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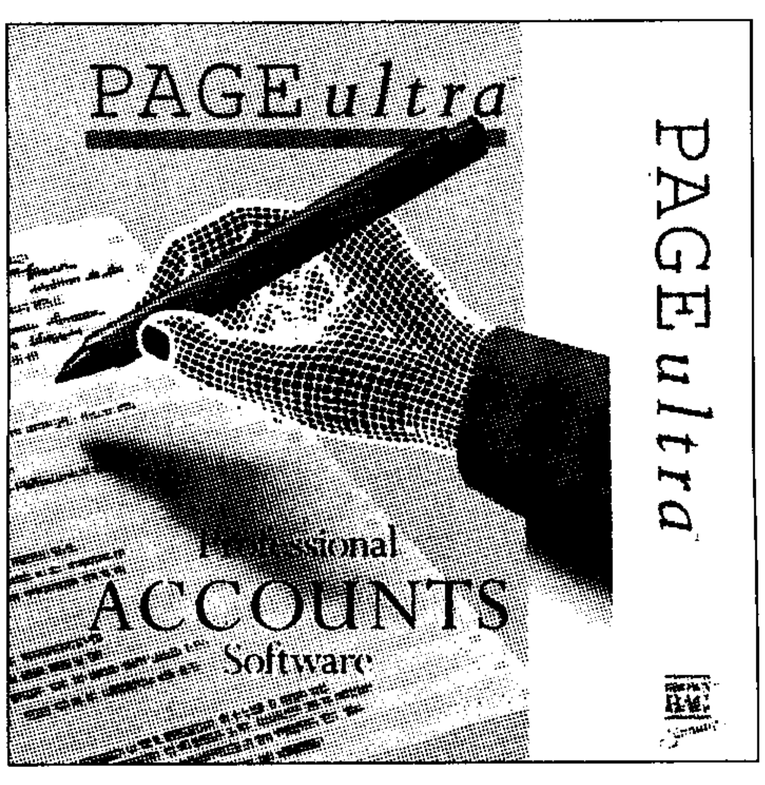

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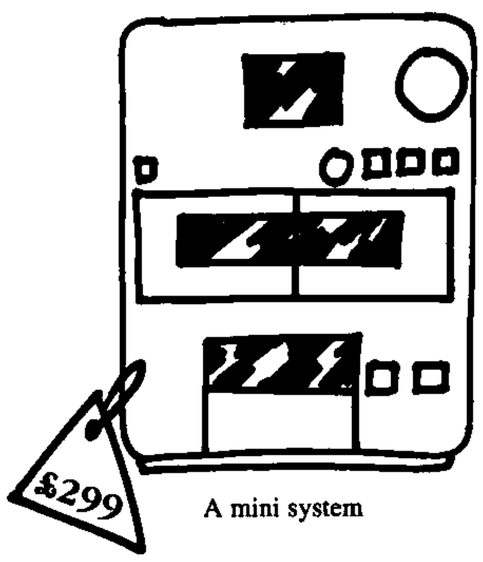

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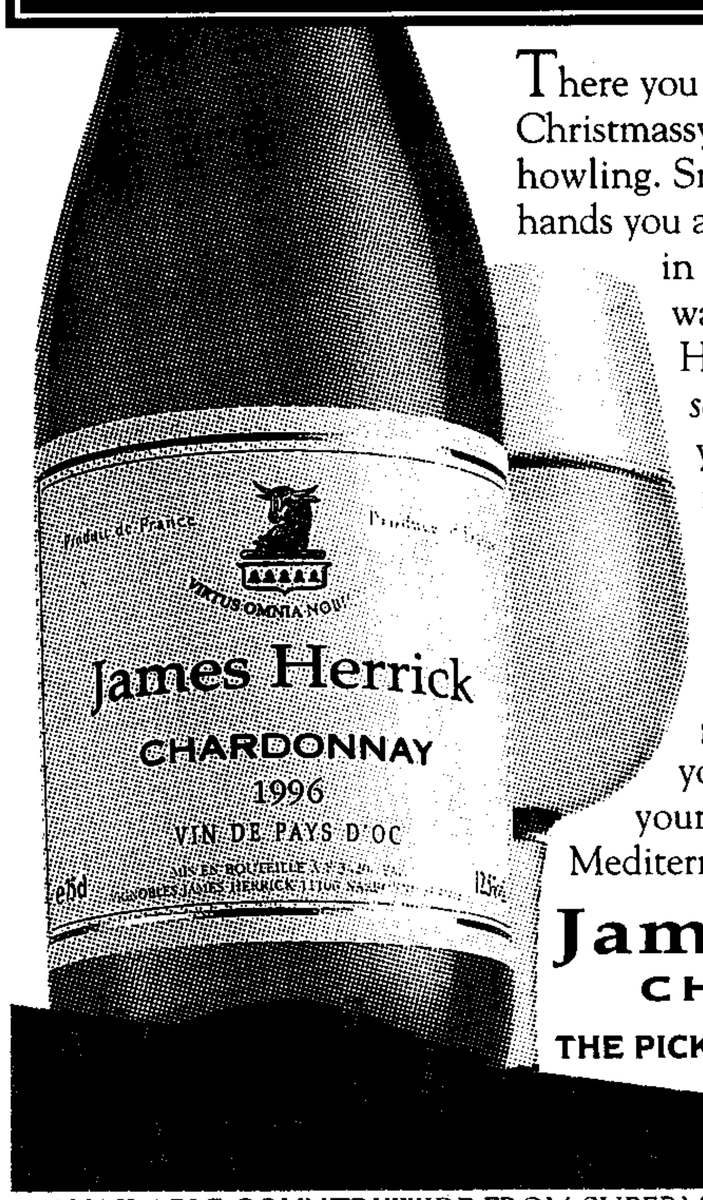

There you are, feeling anything but Christmassy. Rain lashing down. Wind howling. Snow forecast. Then a friend hands you a glass of wine that shimmers in the firelight like sun on the water at St Tropez. James Herrick Chardonnay may not *sound* Mediterranean but as you raise the glass there's a rush of citrus and spice like the Mistral in your face. Then follows a flavour-tour of the South of France - wild thyme, vanilla, cloves, gooseberry, lemon, lime - till you can feel the warmth on your back and the blue Mediterranean between your toes.

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Gnome

MANY kind readers have written to commiserate with my latest failed attempt to be the first man to rollerblade across the Atlantic.

As is well known, the conditions were perfect on the morning of the 4th December when the Gnome Team performed the last-minute checks on the state-of-the-art Gnome Blades. Everything would have gone to plan had not the sea proved unnaturally wet for the time of year, thus causing me to sink rapidly beneath the waves.

But I would like you all to know that this minor setback will in no way deter me from achieving my life's ambition in the New Year — namely, becoming the world's greatest bearded idiot *(Shurely shome mishtake? Ed)*.

Onward and downward!

E. Strobes
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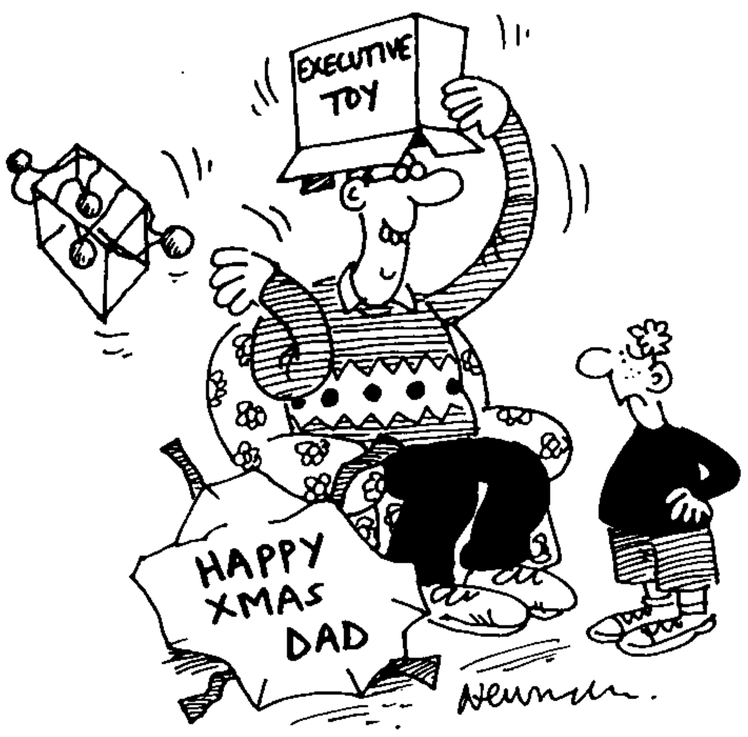

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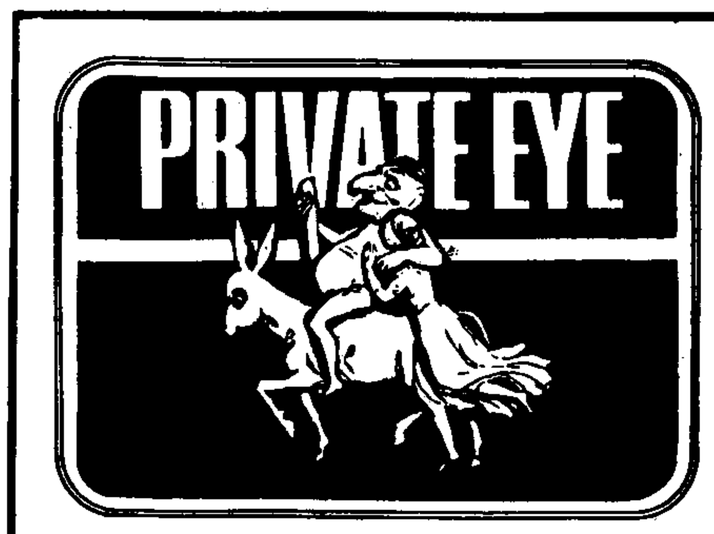


COLOUR SECTION

FOR YEARS the big boys at the Prudential have assured the public that everything was fine in the garden. In particular, two chief executives — Mick Newmarch and Jim Sutcliffe — pooh-poohed suggestions that there was anything wrong in their selling of private pensions.

But in July 1993 a secret memo to all the Pru's branches revealed that a series of special investigations and audits had "uncovered evidence of widespread activity intended to deceive customers and company". In particular the document exposed the disturbing habit of Pru pensions salesmen of forging customers' signatures, proposals and direct debit mandates. Branch managers who were supposed to accompany salesman on house calls preferred to stay at home and fabricate the reports.

The Pru quickly sacked a tiny handful of 23 offenders and covered up the fact that they had been acting with the nod and wink of the company. Jim Sutcliffe, then deputy managing director, said: "I'm a hundred percent certain that the inference of the memo that there is a widespread problem is not correct." Chief executive Mick Newmarch announced that "the instructions we gave our sales staff were adequate" and that not a single pension policy had been mis-sold.

After campaigning furiously against his regulators, Mick Newmarch left in 1995. Jim Sutcliffe became UK chief executive and left this year. Now it is revealed that the Prudential had swindled about 70,000 people by mis-selling them pensions policies, and the Financial Services Authority has denounced the Pru as "a company out of control with deep-seated and long-standing management failures".

FACT TO REMEMBER: Sir Peter Davis, current chief executive of the Pru, who shares his dreams with his customers in his own ads on TV, was the man chosen by Tony Blair to mastermind the government's welfare to work programme.

THE home office and police complaints authority (PCA) are slapping themselves on the back for what they say is a thorough and critical report on the Stephen Lawrence murder. Yet some vital questons about the case are *not even mentioned* in the published report.

On page 10 there is one paragraph about identification parades. It criticises the first identity parade after which "a key witness withdrew cooperation". This was Joe Shepherd who was standing at the south London bus stop before Stephen was attacked but did not actually see the stabbing. The paragraph ends with the sentence: "Later identity parades suffered from similar weaknesses although not to the same extent."

Er, well, it depends what you mean by weaknesses. Three later identity parades were attended by a witness who was with Stephen when he was stabbed. The first parade was abandoned. In the second parade the witness picked out a suspect and two men were charged. The charges were dropped after a police officer not connected with the inquiry had a conversation with the witness and made a statement casting doubt on the reliability of the witness's identification.

Frustrated by the failure of the authorities to prosecute anyone for the murder, the Lawrence family later took out a private prosecution. This case collapsed when the judge refused to allow identification evidence from the witness who had picked out a suspect. Thus both public and private prosecutions were damaged by the discrediting of this witness.

Why was this evidence discredited? Why did a police offer have a conversation which led to the discrediting of the evidence? These are fundamental questions in the Lawrence case. Yet in the PCA report of what Jack Straw calls a "thorough" inquiry they are not even asked.

MARGARET BECKETT, president of the board of trade, held a special press conference to announce proudly publication of her department's inspectors' reports on the Guinness affair.

She had decided to publish, she said, so that the lessons of the sad saga could be learned. Meanwhile she is still sitting nervously on another report — and by all accounts even more explosive — on the flotation of Mirror Group Newspapers in 1991.

The ostensible reason for not publishing the report used to be that the Maxwell brothers, Kevin and Ian, were still awaiting trial. Now the trials have come and gone there is no excuse.

The report is believed to criticize the role of the "sleeping" directors of MGN under Maxwell, who include the current chairman of MGN Robert Clark, and the managing director Charlie "Gorbals" Wilson. Even closer to the Labour bone are two former Maxwell business associates who are now in the government: Lord (Bernard) Donoughue, for instance, now in charge of BSE at the ministry of agriculture; and treasury minister Helen Liddell.

Ms Liddell recently spoke at a conference about city flotations. She was boosted in the blurb as a prime mover in the "successful flotation of Mirror Group Newspapers". It depends what you mean by successful. So securely based was the new company and so completely in charge were the directors who were not members of Maxwell's family that within six months of the flotation Maxwell had stolen all MGN's £100m profit and half the £800m pension fund.

THE foreign office has announced the appointment of its high-flying civil servant Kevin Tebbit (no relation) as head of the government's spy centre GCHQ.

Eye readers will recall Mr Tebbit from issues 890 and 892 which revealed that at the height of the controversy about water contracts in the Far East, Mr Tebbit, while an under-secretary at the FO, joined the board of directors of the international management group Mott Macdonald, which specialised in water projects in the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

"A personalised number plate? For me?"

"A BOY of six is escaping to Australia because he is allergic to Britain," Richard Littlejohn noted last week. "After seven months of New Labour, I know just how he feels."

How odd, then, that the legendary gorblimey specialist is leaving the *Daily Mail* and signing up with "new" Labour's favourite media baron, Rupert Murdoch. From February, he will write a twice-weekly column for the *Sun* and present a chat-show on Sky TV (to be called *Richard Littlejohn: Live and Unhinged*, or somesuch).

How can the rabidly anti-Labour Littlejohn bear to work for a Blairite rag like the *Sun*? "They made me an offer I couldn't refuse," he explains. To be precise: £800,000 a year. As the man himself would say, you couldn't make it up.

PAULA YATES's £500,000 deal with *Hello!* to talk about her grief following the death of her lover Michael Hutchence has fallen through: Yates was insisting the story be written by a friend, American hackette Catherine Mayer.

After the deal collapsed the bereaved Yates's agent approached the *Mail on Sunday* and asked for £250,000 for Paula to talk "exclusively" about her grief, plus another £40,000 for a set of 36 photographs taken last Christmas of her and Hutchence with their baby, Heavenly Hiraani Tiger Lily.

The *MoS* turned the offer down. But the very next day Catherine Mayer tried to sell it the pictures, again unsuccessfully.

Also on offer at an unspecified price is "proof" that Hutchence intended to marry Yates. No takers for that so far, but all is not lost: for talking to the *Sun* about her "real father" Hughie Green ("I feel betrayed, I feel destroyed"), Paula received a fee believed to be not unadjacent to £50,000.

"TEARS of Karli's Snatcher. EXCLUSIVE FIRST PICTURE," screamed the *Mirror*'s front-page headline on 9 December. Alongside a huge, blurred photo of a female face, the paper reported that "the woman accused of kidnapping baby Karli Hawthorne is driven sobbing to prison after being refused bail yesterday."

There were only two things wrong with this journalistic triumph. First, it wasn't true: two days later, in a tiny apology tucked away on page 10, the *Mirror* admitted that the woman in the picture was actually a Group 4 security officer. Secondly, it wasn't a *Mirror* exclusive at all. Although the paper was happy to claim the credit at first, as soon as the blunder was exposed it hastily pointed out that the picture had in fact been "supplied to us by the *Daily Telegraph*".

***EXPRESS* hackette Sarah O'Grady spent days in search of Moonie couples for an article on the latest mass wedding extravaganza. She need have looked no further than her own assistant editor, Mark "Biscuits" Palmer, who himself was married by the Rev Moon back in 1982.**

"And the Practical Joker of the Year is..."

THE prediction in the last *Eye* that *Mirror* deputy editor Brendon "Chucky" Parsons was to become editor of the *People* came true — though after the *Eye* appeared, Mirror Group director Charlie "Gorbals" Wilson summoned the then editor Len Gould to his office to tell him he was "100 percent safe".

Gould returned to the editorial floor to proclaim: "Charlie has asked me to tell you that I have the complete confidence of the management and these rumours must stop!" There was a spontaneous round of applause.

Two days later "Gorbals" ordered the wretched Gould to meet him at the Newport Pagnall motorway service station, where Wilson began with a smirk: "Remember what I said two days ago? Well, I lied!" Having sacked the hapless *People* editor, "Gorbals" announced that he was leaving and added: "By the way, you'll have to pay for the coffee and cakes."

With Gould gone, the legendary Parsons made his mark at the *People* at his very first editorial conference where a sob story about a young woman was put forward. When an executive suggested the paper could play Father Christmas and kit her out in a festive outfit, Chucky was very keen. "Yeah, great! Let's get Gianni Versace!"

There was a moment's silence while executives wondered if the new editor was taking the piss, but it soon dawned that everything they had read about "Chucky" (*Eyes passim*) proved that the legend still lives. He then announced that anyone with the smell of alcohol on their breath would be banned from the office. But who needs to cheer themselves up with drink when "Chucky" is around?

SHORTLY before Christmas a man from the *Daily Star*'s art desk was summoned to the office of the paper's notoriously thirsty editor, Phil Walker.

"I have had a dream," Walker intoned, gazing vacantly into space. "And you are not in my vision."

The art-man was puzzled. "Are you telling me I'm sacked, Phil?" he inquired. The tired and emotional editor merely repeated his previous mantra — after which he slumped back in his chair and fell into a deep sleep. His visitor, quite rightly, concluded that he had indeed been fired, and tiptoed away to collect his P45.

A day or two later Walker and his senior executives took their secretaries out for a Christmas lunch. One secretary entered into the boozy *Daily Star* spirit rather too eagerly, and was soon informing deputy editor Peter Hill that he was the most hated man in the office. "We call you 'thrush'," she revealed. "Because you're an irritating little cunt."

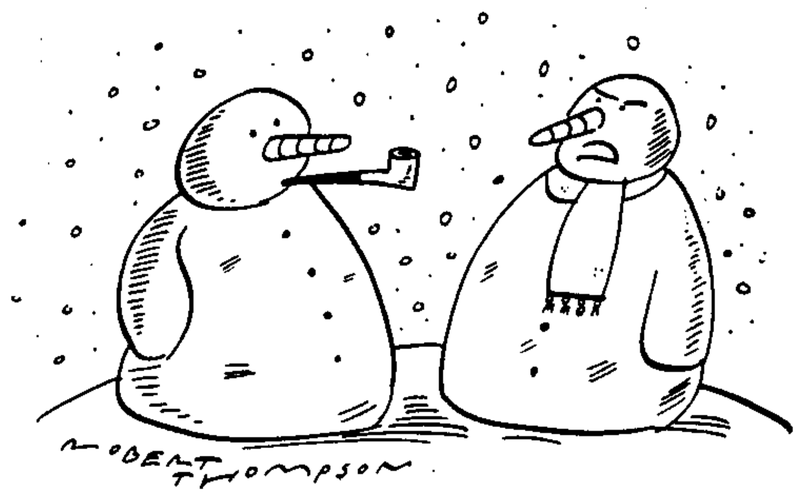
Just like old times... except that the *Star*'s circulation is now in freefall, thanks to the bibulous Walker and the loathsome Hill. Rumours are sweeping the office that the pair will be sacked within three months. Their successor, it seems, is to be roly-poly news editor Hugh Whittow, whose main claim to journalistic fame was to buy up Blackie the donkey some years ago. More importantly, however, he is a regular golfing partner of Lord Stevens of Ludgate.

If that fails to stop the slide, United News and Media may be forced to offload the *Star*. "I'm not going to buy it," porn-baron David Sullivan tells a friend. "I'm going to wait for it to fall into my hands."

"Christmas is coming," the *Eye* noted on 1 November 1996, "and with it, as every year, the inevitable increase in plugs by *Daily Telegraph* chess correspondent Malcolm Pein for his own businesses in his column."

One year on, Pein is maintaining this festive tradition. On 4 December he revealed in the *Telegraph* that Anatoly Karpov "appears at the London Chess Centre this afternoon where he will be signing copies of his new book". On 5 December, he reported that "Anatoly Karpov hit back at Garry Kasparov's claim that the FIDE champion was no longer a match for him. Speaking at the London Chess Centre yesterday, Karpov said..."

What Pein forgot to mention, as usual, is that he owns and manages the London Chess Centre.



"Tobacco sponsorship! How could you?"

***DAILY Mail* agony aunt to the rich Nigel Pratt-Dumpster has a new charity: racehorse owner Robert Sangster, beset by stories that financial woes may force him from the sport of Dumpsters.**

On 26 October the *Sunday Times* wrote: "While rumours of Robert Sangster's withdrawal from the front line continued to grow..." The very next day Dumpster wrote up Sangster as his lead item, a delightful puff which devotedly chronicled his assets, mentioning that his London house was on the market (£7.5m), that he owned 20 percent of Coolmore Stud and had recently flogged four nags to Sheik Mohammed for £4m. Oh, and Sangster hoped to spend more time at his Barbados home. Two days later, Dumpster added the bit he'd forgotten: that Sangster's Barbados pad was "valued in excess of £12m".

On 4 November Dumpster set what may be a world record, mentioning Sangster interests in three separate items. Son Adam looked after "the Australian bloodstock interests"; "pools heir Sangster" had a 2,300-acre estate near Marlborough; and "leading owner-breeder Robert Sangster" popped up in a picture story about Samantha Baring of the banking family.

HACKS at the *European* were delighted to receive expensive, smartly-printed invitations to the "annual Christmas party" of their new boss, Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill, at his Kensington flat on Saturday 13 December. "Be there or Santa won't come," the invitation warned. "No reply necessary."

Neill was indeed hosting a party that evening — but only for his A-list friends such as Sir David Frost. His secretary spent most of the previous day rushing round the office hastily retrieving the fake invitations and warning hacks that they would not be welcome.

Who would hate Brillo Pad enough to organise such an elaborate hoax? *(Thousands of people — Ed.)* Likely culprits at the *European* include the many staff who were excluded from the paper's own Christmas bunfight, held at the Ritz on 15 December. Though the event was supposed to be an office party, Neill invited only selected cronies from the editorial floor.

Meanwhile former hacks at *Sunday Business* — the defunct title recently acquired by the Barclay twins for Brillo — are busily brown-nosing Neill in the hope of being rehired. Anil Bhoyrul, ex-editor of the rag, is now "editor and publisher" of *Business Age*, a magazine which specialises in dodgy businessmen. (The November issue included a page written by jailbird rapist Owen Oyston and an interview with pornographers David and Ralph Gold.) In a recent editorial, Bhoyrul waxed lyrical about the prospects for a relaunched *Sunday Business*: "The philosophy of snapping up disasters on the cheap and making a success of them is great with someone like Neill, who knows what he's doing, at the helm."

Bhoyrul omits to list any previous rescue operations Neill has under his belt to justify this adulation, perhaps because there aren't any — unless you count Brillo Pad's involvement in the super soaraway new *Punch*. Still, the attractions of a job with Neill are obvious. The newly-hired editor of *Sunday Business*, Brillo's old crony Jeff Randall, is said to be on a package worth between £150,000 and £200,000 a year — not bad for editing a paper which doesn't exist.

HACKWATCH AWARDS 1997

MOST SPOOKILY ACCURATE PREDICTION

● "There she was, sailing serenely on towards the Pearly Gates in the full knowledge that her soul was on the VIP guest list, when the Queen turned nasty last year and removed her name from the prayers said for royalty in English churches. In one fell swoop, Diana's prospects — of healthy old age, followed by everlasting life — were snatched from her. With thousands praying for her daily, her body and soul seemed assured of good health. Without that cushion, she is surely doomed..." — Robin McKie in the *Observer*'s Life magazine, 12 January.

● "Working closely with Buckingham Palace, the BBC has laid the foundations for mourning on a scale never experienced on British television... Previous rehearsals have been much more dramatic than the Queen Mother's last weekend. A BBC executive reveals that in the past the Corporation 'killed off' Diana in a car crash." — Chris Blackhurst reports on preparations for a royal death, *Independent on Sunday*, 13 July — six weeks before the real thing.

MOST SPOOKILY DUD PREDICTION

● "Martin Bell and media interference are resented by the tough Tatton Tories. So the despicable Hamilton will almost certainly win at Tatton." — Woodrow Wyatt, *News of the World*, 20 April.

● "LABOUR'S LEAD IN FREEFALL" — Front-page headline, the *Express*, 23 April.

● "Mr Major has been telling friends that not only could he find it fun to be leader of the Opposition but he could stay on to fight another election, if only to make Tony Blair's life a misery." — Chris Buckland, the *Express*, 24 April.

● "A Tory victory is still possible, though unlikely. But an overall Labour majority seems equally unlikely. At the time of writing, I do not believe that Mr Blair is on course to win the 57 seats he would need for an outright win. There could well be another election within a year..." — Bruce Anderson, the *Spectator*, 26 April.

● "I do not believe Tony Blair will win by a landslide. On the contrary, I believe that John Major, who has fought brilliantly, is on course for a majority of around 30-40." — Woodrow Wyatt, *The Times*, 29 April.

● "I am willing to bet — at the risk of much egg on face on Friday morning — that there will, at least, not be a Labour landslide." — Janet "Omelette" Daley, *Daily Telegraph*, 29 April.

● "Michael Portillo is fast emerging as favourite to succeed John Major." — *Daily Mail*, 1 May.

MOST FEARLESS INDEPENDENCE

● "I think the press has a lot of power here, and that can be frustrating." — Elizabeth Murdoch (relation), general manager of Sky TV, interviewed in the *Guardian*.

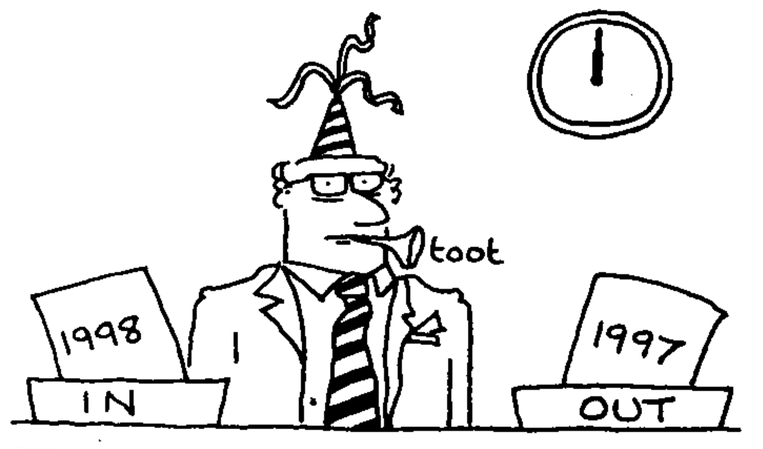
MOST CRAVEN OBEDIENCE

● "The editor of this newspaper has a cottage in Blockley. This, to be fearlessly frank, has some bearing on my presence." — Charles Nevin, the *Guardian*, 1 March, explaining why he is writing a full-page feature about an obscure right-of-way dispute in a Cotswold village.

MOST DESPERATE BID FOR YOOF APPEAL

● "*Take It To The Limit* was the title of a 1970s pop song — and should serve as the Prime Minister's motto as he ponders the date of the next general election." — Editorial in *Daily Telegraph*, January 1997.

● "With his party trailing in the polls, his candidate facing humiliation in the Wirral South by-election, and his ministers at loggerheads over Europe, the Prime Minister could be forgiven for feeling dejected. But he should take heart from an unlikely source — the return to form of the Page Three girl in the shapely form of Melinda Messenger..." — Editorial in *Daily Telegraph*, February 1997.



K. Lamb

● "In what may turn out to be a noisy but colourless election, the demand for exciting characters such as the Spice Girls is bound to exceed demand." — W. F. Deedes, *Daily Telegraph*, March 1997.

MOST EERIE COINCIDENCE

● "There is a scene in the middle of *The Saint* that may, in time, come to be viewed as a critical moment in American movies... As the action unfolded, I sat there with my jaw resting lightly on the floor, and I thought, This is what we have been heading for all these years. Here is a film that makes *no sense at all*." — Anthony Lane, *New Yorker*, 14 April.

● "There is a glorious defining moment in *The Saint*, which may well go down in the history of cinema... As the mayhem piles up, all you can do is sit there with your jaw on your chest, marvelling at a huge budget film which makes no sense at all." — Chris Peachment, the *Express*, 18 April.

MOST EXQUISITE TIMING

● "Troubled Prince William will today demand that his mother Princess Diana dump her playboy lover, Harrods heir Dodi Al-Fayed." — Two-page "exclusive" by *News of the World* royal editor Clive Goodman, published hours after the car crash on 31 August.

● "Many of us feel there is something missing from our lives today... The problem extends to some of the cleverest, wealthiest and most attractive people in the land — among them Princess Diana." — Oliver James attempting "a daring royal psychoanalysis" in the *Sunday Times*, 31 August.

● "It's a pity Gucci don't make designer face zips, then when Princess Diana was on the verge of opening her ill-informed mouth and causing an international incident (an increasingly frequent occurrence these days) she could just zip her trap shut... The Princess, I fear, suffers from the 'Open Gob Before Brain Engages' syndrome — a condition which afflicts the trivial and the brain dead." — Carole Malone, *Sunday Mirror*, 31 August.

MOST VERSATILE OPINIONS

● "Just how many times do Labour plan to betray the Scottish people?... A union under the two-faced New Labour Party is something we want absolutely nothing to do with." — *The Sun* (Scottish edition), 13 March.

"Rise Now And Be a Nation Again — and get there using Labour as a stepping stone. We are throwing our weight behind the Labour Party at this election." — *The Sun* (Scottish edition), 29 March.

● "One is bound to ask why exactly he [William Hague] is the answer to Tory prayers. Where are the ideas and the achievements? He seems to be a blank slate on which many others seek to write." — Editorial in *Daily Telegraph*, 9 June.

"This could be the end of the nightmare. My Hague will reform the party, reconnect it with its roots and provide people with reasons to join it once more... Under William Hague, the Tories can win the next election." — Editorial in *Daily Telegraph*, 20 June.

● "Mr Hague's relatively disappointing performance [in the second ballot] shows the extent of the doubts about his candidacy... Even if he does win tomorrow, his victory will be a poor, weak thing." — Editorial in *The Times*, 18 June.

"The Conservative Party took a first step on the road back to realism last night with the election of William Hague as leader... This morning the Tories have a leader who can stand on a clear and principled position." — Editorial in *The Times*, 20 June.

● "The Versace product is big, bold and glitzy — not designed to appeal to nervous aficionados of 'good taste'. And his choice of celebrity models — naff junior popsters East 17, ex-Take That member Robbie Williams — sometimes lacks discrimination. Without wishing to be cruel, Elton [John] has never exactly been stylish. Other middle-aged Versace-wearing rockers such as Rod Stewart, Sting and Eric Clapton are somewhat past their sell-by date... Even Versace needs to understand that there is such a thing as overkill." — Sophie Laybourne, the *Express*, 20 January.

"Gianni Versace was truly one of the greats... Not only celebrities such as Liz Hurley and Princess Diana but supermodels like Christy Turlington queued up to wear his clothes... Detractors accused him of being vulgar. It is perhaps fairer to say that his look was flashy and exuberant... He was also kind-hearted and his generosity was legendary." — Sophie Laybourne, the *Express*, 16 July.

● "The sight of a paunchy playboy groping a scantily-clad Diana must appal and humiliate Prince William... As the mother of two young sons she ought to have more decorum and sense. She has for many years criticised Prince Charles for being a distant, undemonstrative father. In the long run he's been the more responsible parent and certainly inflicted less damage, anguish and hurt." — Lynda Lee-Potter, *Daily Mail*, 27 August.

"Throughout their childhood she gave her sons endless loving cuddles... She adored her children." — Lynda Lee-Potter, *Daily Mail*, 1 September.

● "Claims that the guilty verdict [on Louise Woodward] shames the whole US judicial system are misplaced." — Editorial in the *Express*, 1 November.

"Judge must right a wrong that shames American law." — Editorial in the *Express*, 2 November.

● "Who could swear Louise was innocent of all involvement? We do not know." — Mary Riddell, the *Mirror*, 1 November.

"She is innocent." — Mary Riddell, the *Mirror*, 1 November.

A GOOD YEAR FOR SOME

JAMES WHITAKER, the *Mirror*'s champagne-swilling former royal hack, now pens a weekly column for the great socialist organ in which the bon viveur instructs the working classes on such "new" Labour issues as pheasant shooting, exotic holidaying and lunching at the Savoy's River Room.

In his first column, Whitaker told his tabloid readers that three of his favourite wines were: Chateau Lafite, Chateau Margaux and Cheval Blanc. On 13 December he announced that he'd been dining at Le Gavroche, where a Czech businessman recently spent £13,000 on a meal. How, thundered the *Mirror* hack, could Victor Kozeny spend £5,000 on a 1985 Romanee Conti vintage? After all, explained Whitaker, "The 1971s, at only £1,000 a bottle more are drinking so much better at the moment."

Last week the *Mirror*'s new Saturday attraction ("He puts the sparkle in your weekend") was spotted doing further perilous research in Vienna on a 24-hour Christmas shopping expedition with millionaire Diana biographer, Andrew Morton. Didn't they do well?

WORLD *in Action*'s recent investigation into the links between Bernie Ecclestone and "new" Labour went ahead in spite of a barrage of bullying phone calls from Downing Street spin-doctors — who, having failed to stop the programme altogether, then tried to insist it should include an interview with home secretary Jack Straw.

Alas the producers were not persuaded that Mr Zero Tolerance could answer their questions satisfactorily. It is good to know that *World in Action* remains dedicated to unearthing to truth — unlike one of its former researchers, a certain Jack Straw.

WHAT happened in the great single mums debate to Oona King MP, the fervent Blairista who sits for Bethnal Green and Bow — a constituency with more single mums than anywhere else in the country?

On Tuesday 9 December Matthew Tempest, one of her constituents, rang her constituency office to ask for an appointment to discuss cycle lanes. The MP's enthusiastic assistant there at once asked Mr Tempest to come in on the following Thursday morning from 9.30 to 11.30, when the MP had a surgery.

When Tempest arrived he joined a small band of constituents who had come along to lobby their MP. On the door was a list of the MP's surgeries including, sure enough, 11 December. But the MP wasn't there. An official blandly told the crowd she was abroad on a mission which had been arranged long ago.

Puzzled, Mr Tempest made further inquiries. He was then told that Ms King had been very recently invited on a "fact-finding" visit to Bangladesh by the president of that country who wanted her to share in some victory celebrations. The arrangements were made "at the very last minute at the end of last week" and Oona King had taken off on the very Tuesday Mr Tempest had been invited to her surgery. That's why she missed the single mums debate on 10 December and didn't have to make a painful choice between voting against her leader or for her constituents.

THE government's determination to cut benefit to single mothers embarrassed even the normally irrepressible Tony Banks.

The sports minister's constituents in West Ham need the extra money more than most, but this was not the only reason for his melancholy. Each year Banks brings the entire membership of his constituency general management committee for drinks at the House of Commons, the date chosen by them.

And what date did they choose this year? Bloody Wednesday: the night King Herod of Downing Street chose for his own slaughter of the innocents when he had his men (and women) cruelly remove bread from the plates of children just in time for Christmas.

WHEN a parliamentary delegation visited Saudi Arabia its mission was to spread good will about British trade and discuss the two British nurses being held for the murder of Yvonne Gilford.

On their way back to Britain the members of parliament found themselves with a two-hour wait at Riyadh airport.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, the Tory MP for Cirencester and Tewkesbury, became very irate that the delegation was not receiving the VIP treatment it deserved during the delay. His remonstrations became so unruly that police were called and the British ambassador was woken at 2am to come and negotiate with his seething countryman.

Eventually the MP was quietened and the, er, goodwill mission caught its plane home.

WHO has been misusing the Commons postal franking service to send out party invitations and Christmas cards?

The first to come to light is an invitation from Lewisham and Deptford Labour party to "Have fun this Christmas with Labour" at its annual bash. Party members were surprised to receive invitations in House of Commons postage paid envelopes on the back of which was a printed message: "If undelivered please return to Joan Ruddock MP."

Joan Ruddock is the MP for, er, Lewisham and Deptford and an errant party worker must be to blame: the MP herself would never have sanctioned such blatant abuse of Commons money.

GOVERNMENT leaks have now become uncontrollable: voters in the government lobby on Tuesday for the government of Wales bill had to wade through water cascading from the ceiling and avoid knocking over no fewer than six buckets.

At one stage the downpour was so powerful that in the middle of a vote the lights went off.

David Clark, currently chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster, had earlier apologised to the House for the premature disclosure of the freedom of information legislation. But he busily denied any responsibility for these later leaks.

Defence minister John Reid shouted "send for Derry for the refurbishment", a military reference to Lord Derry "Cardinal Wolsey" Irvine, whose new wallpaper in his lord chancellor's quarters cost £59,000. And an Irish MP shouted: "We'll guard old Derry's walls."

"You'd have to at that price," shot back Reid.

"Ban flies, spiders, birds, cats, dogs and horses!"

NEW LABOUR, NEW GARBAGE

"AS we approach Christmas and the season of goodwill I thought it would be a good idea to exchange gifts. Instead of expensive presents I thought it would be a good time to exchange valuable ideas.

"I have spent the past seven months generating campaign initiatives. Some of these have been very successful; others less so. I am certain that all members have been doing the same. However, unless we bump into one another in the tea room we rarely have the opportunity to learn from others' experiences.

"I have spoken to many members who would like to become involved in sharing experiences. Already colleagues have said they would welcome advice about blitzing/roving surgeries, recruitment, time management, use of constituency weeks and much else. I am willing to act as a coordinator of such an initiative in the new year if colleagues are willing to provide information/examples of publicity, etc...

"I shall spend the festive period celebrating, getting married and designing the initial circular inviting ideas. If you have any views on this prior to the new year please do call me..."

— Letter from Jim Murphy, Labour MP for Eastwood, to parliamentary colleagues.

FOREIGN Secretary Robin Cook appealed to farmers to end their blockade. He said it was essential for the single market that they let through lorries from Ireland.

Brighton & Hove Argus

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

JERRY HAYES, former Tory MP for Harlow, has found life after parliament rather dull: after a course on how to be a DJ at his local Essex radio, he became political editor of, er, *Punch*.

During the festive season, however, he has been letting his hair down and has been seen tired and emotional at various bashes.

At one party a swaying Hayes boasted to hacks about an eight-page special he was producing for pisspoor *Punch* on the life and times of party spin doctor Peter Mandelson.

"Will it have details about his sex life?" asked the hacks.

"Oh no," replied Hayes. "It's most improper to write about politicians' sex lives." Hayes would know: it was his sex life that his "gay lover" exposed relentlessly in the *News of the Screws*.

At a party at the Irish Club Hayes kept everyone entertained when he demanded to know what was sticking out of a young Tory's spectacles. "Oh that's just a little screw," replied the youth. Hayes turned to a female lobbyist and leered: "Everyone needs a little screw sometimes, don't they?" How the mighty are fallen!

OUT OF AFRICA

ANDREW HUNTER, dimwitted Tory MP for Basingstoke, must have been intrigued at the news from South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission during hearings about Comrade Winnie.

Two former apartheid secret policemen told Archbishop Desmond Tutu that a dirty tricks unit called Stratcom once managed to plant disinformation in "the House of Commons and with the British PM" about the ANC inviting the IRA to a conference.

This bears an uncanny resemblance to another incident, in 1988, when the hitherto obscure Hunter caused a sensation in the Commons by alleging that the ANC was manufacturing bombs with the help of the IRA. His dossier, announced Hunter, had been sent to the PM, Margaret Thatcher. His allegations gained headlines at the time but nothing more was ever heard of them.

And where did the former Harrow schoolmaster get his information? In 1988 he told the *Daily Mirror* that a British-born ANC guerrilla, Susan Westcott, had confessed this to him in her Pretoria cell. Intriguingly Westcott had been held in solitary confinement for nine months, and neither British embassy officials nor her own lawyer had been allowed to see her. Released in 1991, Westcott furiously denied Hunter's wild allegations telling the *Mirror*: "This is a complete lie."

Westcott, a former student at the University of Warwick, was baffled why the MP had visited her and said: "He asked me as he was leaving whether I had met any Irishmen in ANC camps in Angola and I said no, definitely not."

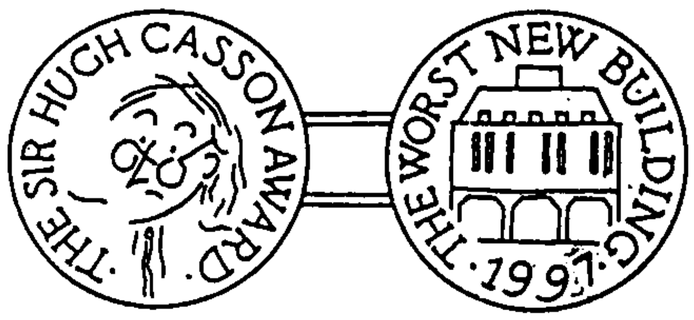
The MP was no stranger to South Africa, frequently flying first class, all expenses paid, to tiny "Bantustan", Bophuthatswana. In 1988 he went three times. Unable to make a fourth free visit, he sent his wife Janet instead. Known as the MP for Bophuthatswana, "White" Hunter shamelessly plugged the corrupt statelet at every opportunity in the Commons, denouncing "the shame and mockery of supporting one man one vote".

Despite losing his heroic battle against democracy in South Africa, the member for Bophuthatswana could now strike one final blow against the ANC. "White" Hunter should testify to Tutu's truth commission about his famous ANC-IRA dossier — and at last reveal the real source for his bizarre allegations.

'Backbiter'

NOOKS and CORNERS

THERE was stiff competition this year to find the New British building worthy of the Sir Hugh Casson medal as our judges were faced with several exciting new masterpieces by knighted architects, both living and dead.



An obvious contender was, of course, No 1 Poultry, the commercial block in the City of London designed by the late Sir James Stirling in which Sir Jocelyn Stevens curiously chose to launch the annual report of English Heritage last month, so delivering a deliberate insult to all those inside the organisation and out who had fought so hard in two public inquiries to save the eight listed buildings which once stood on the site (*Eye* 937). As Ol' Piranha Teeth put it oxymoronically, it is a "remarkable example of our new heritage".

No 1 Poultry is, in fact, rather an old bit of new heritage as it was designed more than a decade ago when its architect was still alive. Perhaps it deserves the Casson medal because it is a tangible monument to the taste of the prime minister of the day, Margaret Thatcher, as well as to that of its original builder, that creature of fashion, My Lord Palumbo.

Like the New British Library it would certainly never have been built without her support. In this case, the proposed tower by the (dead) Mies van der Rohe having been dismissed at the first public inquiry, the late Nicholas Ridley, as secretary of state for the environment, seized on the comment by his inspector at the second one that the Stirling design "might be a masterpiece" and let it go ahead. We were told, of course, that this case was unique, that overriding the usual presumption in favour of listed buildings because of the supposed quality of the proposed replacement would not be allowed to set a precedent. Some hope!

Well, is it a masterpiece? Now the wraps are off we can see that it certainly is not. All it is an overscaled collection of the architect's usual clichés all crammed together on an inappropriate confined site, exhibiting none of the control and imagination displayed in Stirling's Staatsgalerie at Stuttgart: the circular drums, the Egyptian cornices, the neo-Constructivist chunks of glazing, the submarine-like conning tower and the peculiarly ugly big arch placed so crudely on the prominent acute corner facing the Royal Exchange. Is this really what Stirling wanted? In fact, Stirling soon got fed up with the egregious Palumbo and delegated this job to Laurence Bain.

That, of course, is no reason not to give this lumpen extrusion of Battenberg cake the Casson medal. Nor is the fact that its ostensible architect is no longer with us — this year's Stirling Prize has, after all, just been given to the late Big Jim's Music School at Stuttgart. Nice to keep it in the family. But a more telling objection is that No 1 Poultry is still not quite finished, that cladding is still being fixed to its raw concrete frame and we cannot yet get inside. So perhaps a candidate for the Casson Medal for 1998.

Which leaves the field clear, yet again, for Sir Norman Foster OM and his new conference centre in a car park by the Clyde in Glasgow. This vaguely anthropomorphic composition of overlapping aluminium-clad shells has been affectionately nicknamed the "Armadillo", when its shape in fact more resembles that of a wood louse. It certainly represents a departure from the usual minimal High Tec shed in which Foster's firm has long specialised. Glasgow wanted something special and distinctive to enhance the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre (SECC), which looks like a huge hypermarket, so it has been given a sort of *ersatz* Sydney Opera House, a piece of cut-price expressionism.

This thing represents a triumphant betrayal of all that modern architecture was meant to stand for. Its unusual exterior form is no real reflection of the internal crudely finished spaces and there is nothing here of the internal drama of Frank Gehry's new museum in Bilbao, where the shiny metal-clad exterior is wild and genuinely original in form.

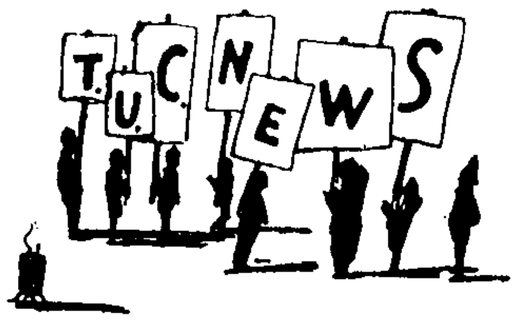
In Glasgow, the 3,000-seat conference hall or "industrial theatre" may be oval in plan — with accommodation around the perimeter — but that is as far as the relationship goes. The gaps between the exterior shells — the *raison d'etre* of the design — were meant to be glazed, to let natural light into the interior. But in the event glass was replaced by sheets of metal to save money. So what we are left with is pure image, a Designer Building: appropriate perhaps.

Glasgow is the city that gave Charles Rennie Mackintosh and "Greek" Thomson to the world, and in 1999 it is to be the Arts Council's city of architecture and design. Yet when a new building is required as a landmark to do something with the remote wasteland by the river where the SECC was so stupidly placed, a smart London architect is wheeled in.

Nothing new here, in fact. When in the last century the university betrayed Glasgow by hiring a fashionable London architect in the shape of Sir Gilbert Scott to design its new buildings, Alexander Thomson complained that "everybody knows that his establishment being the most fashionable in the metropolis, his business so enormous that, to expect him to bestow more than the most casual consideration upon the work which passes through his office, is altogether unreasonable." Precisely the same might be said of Foster's office.

Well, Foster carried off the Casson Medal in 1995. But in the year he trumped his former partner, My Lord Rogers of Riverside, by getting the OM, it seems appropriate that he should get this most prestigious award again for this tin louse by the Clyde: a building which only symbolises loss of nerve and the modern tyranny of reputations.

'Piloti'



UNION NEWS

ONE of the first people to be reported to the TUC's Bad Bullying Boss hotline, opened earlier this month to "name and shame" dictatorial employers, was none other than the general secretary of the GMB trade union, John Edmonds.

He was reported for bulldozing through "flexible working practices" and rejecting all staff suggestions at his own Wimbledon HQ. This was after condemning such practices at this year's conferences of the TUC, the GMB and the Labour party.

Edmonds recently refused staff permission to hold a union meeting on GMB premises, and then sent his personnel officer to eavesdrop when they adjourned to an alleyway nearby.

The member of staff who reported Edmonds was too frightened to give her name or age to the "confidential" hotline because she feared another of his legendary "rages". Needless to say, the TUC decided it would be too embarrassing to "name and shame" the Walrus, as he's known in union circles — not least because it's all true.

John Edmonds is 53, has never had a proper job in his life and fully expects to be made a Labour peer.

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

THE *Sunday Times* **reveals that Imran Khan has been asked to help negotiate the release of two British hostages — Camilla Carr and Jon James — held in the Russian republic of Chechnya.**

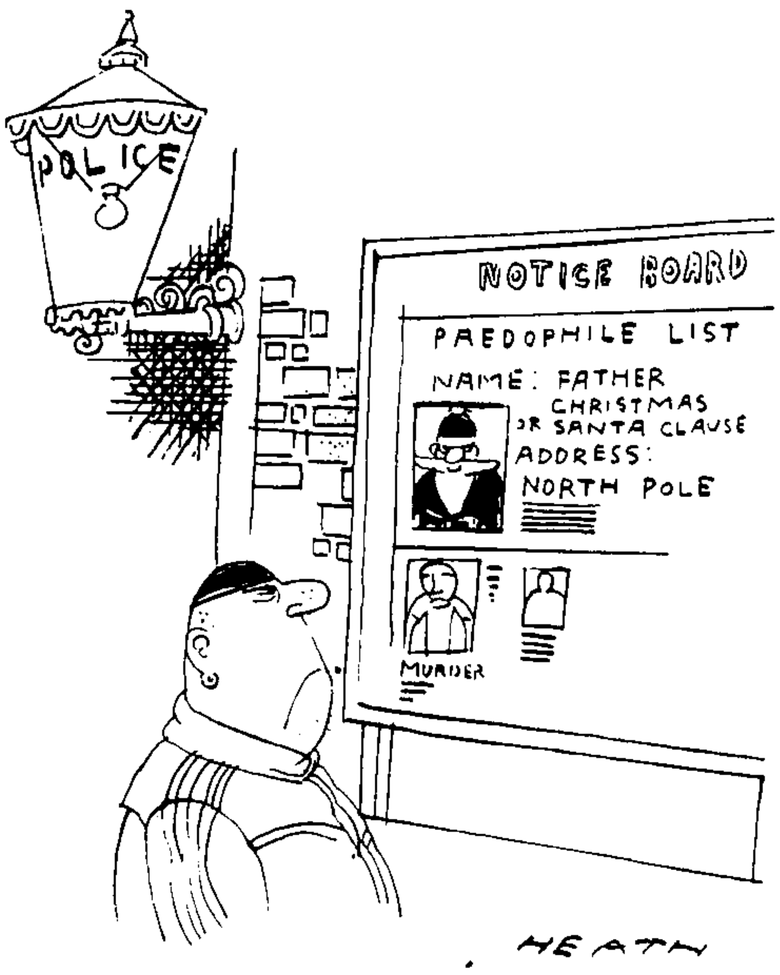
The former cricketer went on a three-day "secret" mission to Grozny in October and met the Chechen president after plans to send in four ex-SAS kidnap specialists were blocked by the Russian government.

Imran is, of course, the son-in-law of the late Sir Jammy Fishpaste. What the *Sunday Times* has failed to notice is the many other intriguing connections between Goldsmith's acolytes and the Chechen regime.

Sir Jimmy's former PR man Patrick Robertson, now general secretary of the Referendum Movement, accompanied Imran Khan on his trip. Last month Robertson was again in attendance when Lord McAlpine, chairman of the Referendum Movement, paid a "business visit" to Grozny. Robertson admitted to the *Eye* that he is in the pay of the Chechen government. "They are my clients. I go there quite a lot — not just Chechnya but all over the Caucasus."

Meanwhile another leading light in the Referendum Movement, Robin Birley — Patrick Robertson's flatmate — recently gave a dinner for Khozhe-Akhmed Noukhaev, Chechen deputy prime minister, at Harry's Bar in Mayfair. Birley is the godson of Jimmy Goldsmith and step-brother of Jemima Khan.

Oh, and the four ex-SAS men were supplied by Resolution Security, a firm whose directors include Robertson's former business partner Lord Parkinson. Resolution Security provides close-protection minders for the Goldsmith family and was hired to vet Referendum Party candidates at the last election.



EYE TV

Channel 5 (some areas)

AT THE end of 1997 Channel 4 chose, with typical individuality, to celebrate its own birthday (its 15th) rather than Jesus's in the Christmas schedules. But the anniversary year of what had once been Britain's terrestrial newcomer neatly coincided with the launch of two new major channels. Will they one day also celebrate 15th anniversaries?

With regard to the BBC's all-day journalism network News 24 (reviewed in *Eye* 938), it's frankly still hard to imagine it reaching 15 weeks: the missing videos, uncalled phone-ins and autocue bloops continue to suggest a *Drop The Dead Donkey* played for real.

But what of Channel 5? The latest and last British terrestrial network, launched at Easter in a slew of newspaper stories about the difficulty of tuning TV sets to receive it, marks a first Christmas and is about to begin its first full year of broadcasting with its third relaunch. Well, not a relaunch, says programme controller Dawn Airey: merely another total overhaul of the schedule.

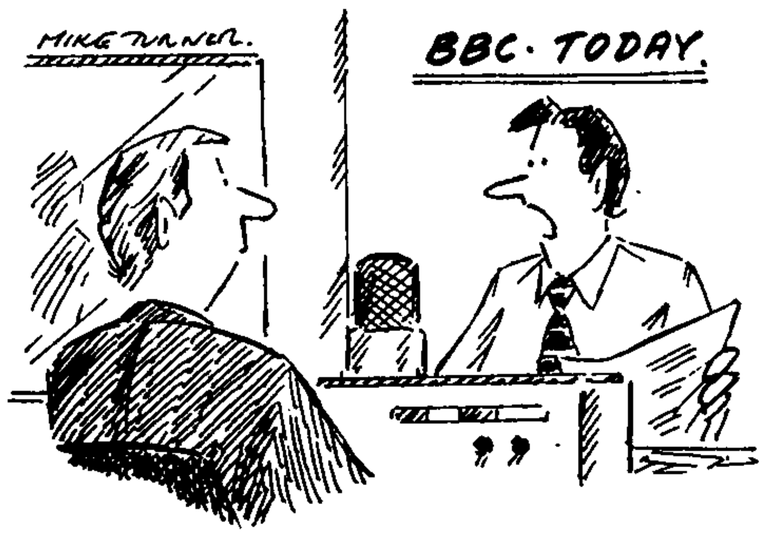
So how is it looking? After elaborate and expensive work by a team of qualified technicians, Square Eyes' set began to show pictures. Before the signal began to fade again, Square Eyes was able to watch a number of shows.

The Comedy Network featured a number of desperate stand-up comics. How's this for a topical BSE-related gag? "I regret to say that a link has been established between cows and... milk."

Tibs And Fibs is C5's version of those popular yob gameshows. This one is medically-based — a kind of *They Think It's All Ovaries* — in which Tony Slattery asks straightfaced medical questions which permit Morwenna Banks to refer to the prostate gland as "the anal love button" and to ask one of the resident docs: "Have you ever lit a patient's farts?"

Exclusive is a gormless showbiz news wrap-up in which plum-mouthed presenters desperately struggle to speak tabloidese and Hollywoodese in which Michael Barrymore becomes "mad-cap funnyman Michael Barrymore" and viewers are told that: "Cher became involved in a legal rumpus with the builders of her dream-home". Unfortunately, during the unscripted interviews the hosts start talking like the English middle-class arts grads they are. "Did you try to quantify and expand on their various qualities?" the director of the Spice Girls movie was asked. For the record, he replied: "No. It's inherent."

"Would you please not interrupt my questions with your answers!"



On *The Jack Docherty Show*, the nightly talk-show, the Scottish host burst on to set wearing a wig and doing an American accent. This seemed to be a parody of David Letterman but, given that Docherty's programme has already stolen everything from Letterman except his girlfriend, this seemed a risky idea. Disturbingly, Docherty's main running gag seems to be about how bad his scripted material is.

The picture then faded away. But, as these programmes suggest, the problem with Channel 5 is that it still has no strategy beyond monthly survival. A good way of telling if something has made a cultural impact is whether a comic stereotype exists. Channel 4 rapidly became the butt of rightwing jokes about sex and swearing on screen and subtitled Hungarian classic movies.

This crass parody was in fact a compliment. It acknowledged a distinctive attitude in the programming. The gags about Channel 5 are still along the lines of no one being able to watch it and those few who can having to put up with fuzzy pictures. In terms of technical reputation, Channel 5 remains on a par with its motoring namesake, the Sinclair C5.

It's true that television's C5 has so far avoided the classic media-launch fate of a corporate bloodbath or shareholder crisis and this is to its credit. But what about the programmes? So far the network's survival has been based on buying up exclusive rights to big football matches or movies (a strategy copyrighted to the Digger), having a sassy lassie reading the news (anyone remember Selina Scott?) and getting someone to pretend to be David Letterman. (Anyone remember Jonathan Ross?)

As saleslines go, "You saw it here second (if you were able to see it at all)" doesn't sound like the kind of thing we'll be celebrating in 15 years.

'Square Eyes'

MEDIA NEWS

BBC Worldwide, which sells the corporations' output abroad, came up with the brilliant marketing wheeze for customers forced to wait on line when phoning in: playing the Teletubbies Number One Hit, "Teletubbies Say Eh-Oh!"

The BBC was flooded with so many complaints it was forced to change to a more festive Handel choral interlude.

DAVID MELLOR, the ex-Tory MP who knows a thing or two about adult entertainment, got in a lather on Radio 5 last Friday when he stood in for Nicky Campbell.

Mellor tackled an admittedly offensive new video game called *Grand Theft Auto*, implying that the publisher's parent company, being German, somehow explained it all... concentration camps, etc. Mellor's glasses steamed up as he quoted from the company's PR material, which though tacky seemed too petty to justify the great man's magnificent ire.

And who were the PR men in question? Step forward Max Clifford Associates, among whose other clients are an actress called... Antonia De Sancha.

THE appointment of Simon Shaps, ex-LWT wallah, as new director of programmes at Granada Television, is likely to spark yet more resignations at the one-time quality TV station.

In the past two months Granada has been losing top executives like nobody's business; others can be expected to follow as the company presses ahead with its plan to take over the rest of the ITV network and send its shares through the £10 barrier by dumbing-down its output.

At a conference in Manchester two weeks ago, Granada executives were again boasting of their commitment to regional programming. What they omitted to mention was that Granada has just slashed its regional budget by more than £2m. The company also gave some staff an early Christmas bonus — 150 redundancies at LWT, Yorkshire TV and Granada itself.

Still, it hasn't all been glum news. A week after announcing the redundancies, Steve Morrison, md of the Granada Group, told all executives to bring their passports and overnight bags to London where they were whisked off on Eurostar for a boozy stay in Paris. Those who felt this tactless in the light of the redundancies were called "Humbugs".

***YOU and Yours*, the consumer affairs programme, was one of the lucky Radio 4 shows that avoided James Boyle's axe. It was even doubled in length in the rescheduling.**

Alas, this mark of approval cannot save the programme's Manchester office, which will close in March despite the BBC's stated commitment to the regions.

But can the savings that will be made by shutting one small office with two desks, a shared computer and a share of a self-operated studio really make up for the lost regional link? Manchester contributes at least one programme a month to the series, and its investigative scoops have been highly praised by the radio critics. In the land of Birtian management, it all makes sense.

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR...
WHEN THAT RIDICULOUS MAN WITH THE BEARD...
WHO NOBODY BELIEVES IN...
COMES INTO OUR HOMES...
AND GIVES US SOMETHING WE DON'T WANT!
Virgin RADIO
"It's all yours!"
Pay R. Branson £83 million
C Evans
Ken Pyne

THE radio division of BBC's newsgathering empire, marhsalled by whey-faced apparatchik Stephen Mitchell, has hit on a new wheeze for saving money — skimming it off the staff.

Since there are no "advances on legitimate expenses" in Birtland, hacks and producers on assignment, at home or abroad, are now commanded to pay hotel, food and laundry bills with their own credit cards. They can then claim the money back later; but whether it will be paid is quite another matter.

"Why," drivelled a boffin from accounts recently, in the BBC newspaper *Ariel* (aka *Pravda*), "should the licence-payers fund reporters' trips?" The obvious answer — that most institutions advance basic living expenses to employees ordered off home-base as part of their job — cuts little ice with the desk-jockeys now running BBC news, many of whom have never left the office on a story in their lives.

One Radio 4 producer recently had to pay (from her own current account) the £3,000 travel, communications and feeding costs of a researcher on a 10-day mission to Israel because the researcher lacked plastic. Another victim, reporter Valerie Jones, put in an expenses claim after returning from a lengthy assignment only to discover that most of the items were refused — including the cost of laundering her underwear while away on BBC duties.

"I have just had my Amex card suspended," she revealed in a *cri de coeur* posted on the BBC's computer noticeboard, Basys. "I've had to transfer £1,500 from my deposit account to my current account to cover the bill."

All BBC reporters were recently instructed by newsgathering boss Richard Sambrook to keep several changes of clothing permanently packed in a suitcase, in case they were suddenly sent off to Ulan Bator or Ougadougou. But it seems they mustn't actually *wash* the the clothes. The increasingly odiferous hacks of Broadcasting House are now threatening to post their used smalls to Mitchell's home address in Harpenden, Herts, until he faces up to his responsibilities.

THERE's more bad news for Owen Oyston following his failure to persuade the appeal court that millionaire womanisers never commit rape.

While daddy's languished in prison, charmless daughter Karen has been running the radio stations which were to form the foundation of a post-release media group. She bought two Ulster commercial stations in the last year to add to the one her father picked up while on bail.

Apart from provoking mass walkouts by staff, her main achievement was to be fined twice by the Radio Authority for breaching licence agreements and be given a formal written warning for not keeping legally required tapes of broadcasts.

Following the appeal court's decision comes a provisional finding by the Radio Authority that Owen Oyston is not, as the law requires, a "fit and proper person" to exercise control of broadcast licences. The Oystons have been given until 31 December to explain why the franchises should not be readvertised. Given that the stations were purchased with Owen Oyston's funds, the future looks bleak.

Meanwhile, the fact that the authority has invoked the "fit and proper" rule for the first time must give pause for thought — or rant — to Mohamed Fayed. Although he hasn't been convicted of rape, Fayed has been involved in all sorts of adventures and has repeatedly boasted of bribing MPs. Will Liberty Radio's licence now come under regulatory scrutiny too?

SPARKS are flying at BBC Radio Wales after Heidi Williams, the branch chair of Bectu, the broadcasting union, wrote an article for the staff newsletter in which she berated management for the 23 redundancies they have planned to try to meet budget targets in the next financial year.

As she pointed out, bi-media plans might mean fewer staff are needed, but plans for digital channels and new commissions would need extra staff. So to make the Birtist cross-genre dream come true they need more people, not less, Williams argued.

Could it be a coincidence that the very next article was about a travel attachment award to a BBC Wales staff member who will be sent on a study tour of Brazil next spring. The lucky employee? The troublesome Heidi Williams.

WORLD OF LADS

NICHOLAS COLERIDGE, who installed ex-*loaded* editor James Brown at the somewhat posher *GQ*, must be delighted with his choice.

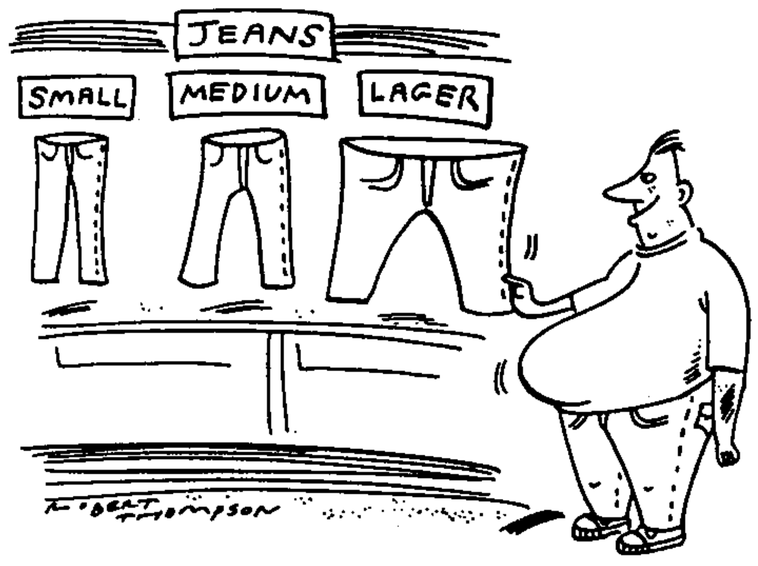
A few months down the road, Brown has impressed staff with his courtesy, charm and aptitude for hard work.

Two weeks ago he managed one day in five in the office. The other four were spent battling a week-long hangover. The following week he surprised staff by coming in — but then spoilt the effect by vomiting into his bin.

Brown then removed the bag of sick, carried it into the main office, gobbed into another bin and placed the sick on top of some other bits of toxic waste. "Better not go near that for a while," he said before retiring to his office and spending two days curled up in a sleeping bag on his sofa.

Restored to health, Brown went to work: asking if his staff's time-keeping was up to scratch before doing a little light sacking: abruptly dismissing a sub and the popular arts editor Francesca Ryan.

Many wonder how publisher Coleridge can claim that *GQ* is not being dumbed down if the position of arts editor is now said to be superfluous. Sales are not rising, the current issue is performing dismally and Brown is said to be modelling his next year's issues on lads' footy mag *Goal*. The Coleridge-Brown love affair may soon be over...



LIBRARY NEWS

AT LEAST the Bristol Arts Library, which is slowly being whittled down, split up and generally destroyed, hasn't had to cancel Christmas.

As the library's Ann Casey wrote in a memo: "Various staff were under the impression that there was a problem with being able to celebrate Christmas in libraries... there is no bar on celebrating Christmas, particularly as we now celebrate festivals from many different religions and cultures."

Meanwhile the Corporation of London — the local authority famous for having £750m of invested capital — has decided it needs to make cuts and so is cutting library opening hours by 20 percent.

Guildhall Library's Saturday service will go and Camomile Street and Shoe Lane libraries will close one day a week. Savings will be around £60,000 — somewhat modest compared to the interest on the corporation's investments.

DIANABALLS

"PUBLIC emotion after the death of Princess Diana has been associated with an increase in consultations with general practitioners for depression... What remains unclear is what the longer term effect of this public grief will be: life events research shows that there may be an increase in psychiatric morbidity. A formal diagnosis of depression, however, requires symptoms to be present for two weeks (international classification of diseases, 10th revision)."

— Letter in British Medical Journal *from psychiatrists at South Kensington and Chelsea Mental Health Centre and Imperial College School of Medicine.*

"Symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder can be found in people not directly exposed to the traumatic event or exposed to stressors that do not meet the DSM-III-R criteria of severity. In light of such findings, we measured the degree of psychological distress that the death and funeral of Princess Diana caused... The mean (SD) score on the impact of events scale was 16.94 (12.75) for the death of Princess Diana and 19.17 (13.32) for the funeral. Scores ranged from 0 to 44 for the death of Princess Diana (28% scored above the diagnostic cutoff score of 25) and from 0 to 57 for the funeral (37% above the cutoff). These results show that the profound psychological impact of the death and funeral of Princess Diana can be equated with traditional stressors identified in the trauma research literature, evidenced by a substantial percentage (28-32%) of our sample that showed symptoms indicating post-traumatic stress."

— Letter in British Medical Journal *from lecturers at Department of Social Sciences (Psychology), Nottingham Trent University (both submitted by Dr E. Gradwell).*

"The Death of Diana — what next? It's not just the death of a Princess but the circumstances in which she died that make the world stop and reflect."

— Front-page headline on the autumn issue of Ronac, *newspaper of the "concrete products company" Ronacrete.*

WICKED WHICH?

A NEW conflict of interest has arisen involving the Consumers' Association (CA) casting further doubt on the integrity of *Which?* magazine's comparison charts.

Eye readers will recall (*Eye* 929) how the CA, a registered charity, earned commission by rigging one of its "best buy" charts to artificially include the Beneficial Bank's *Which?* magazine branded credit card. Now disquiet concerns huge billboard adverts that appeared across Britain earlier this year paid for by a company called International CableTel, a subsidiary of New York-based NTL Inc.

The ads quoted *Which?* in damning British Telecom and agreed with the magazine's suggestion that subscribers switch from BT to their local cable operator. Given that NTL controls some of the UK's largest cable franchises, it's not surprising it should want to see BT slagged off, especially by an "unbiased" party.

But it transpires that there is a close but undisclosed link between CA and NTL. In the same way that the *Which?* credit card is really issued by Beneficial Bank, the CA's costly internet access service, *Which? Net*, is actually run by... NTL.

Strangely there's no mention of this fact in *Which?* or on its on-line service — not even on the pages where BT is criticised and NTL's CableTel subsidiary praised.

DOING THE ROUNDS

SPARE a thought this Christmas for addicted doctors. There are 13,000 of us in the UK still practising the noble art while dependent on alcohol or drugs — an unbelievable statistic if it didn't come from the British Medical Association.

The BMA is trying to tackle the problem through a 24-hour stress line launched in April 1996. In the first year, 3,300 calls were received, 57 percent from women doctors who make up a third of the workforce. A third of the calls dealt with emotional problems (anxiety, stress, depression); a quarter complained about work practices; but very few admitted to an addiction problem. And even fewer were prepared to whistleblow on colleagues.

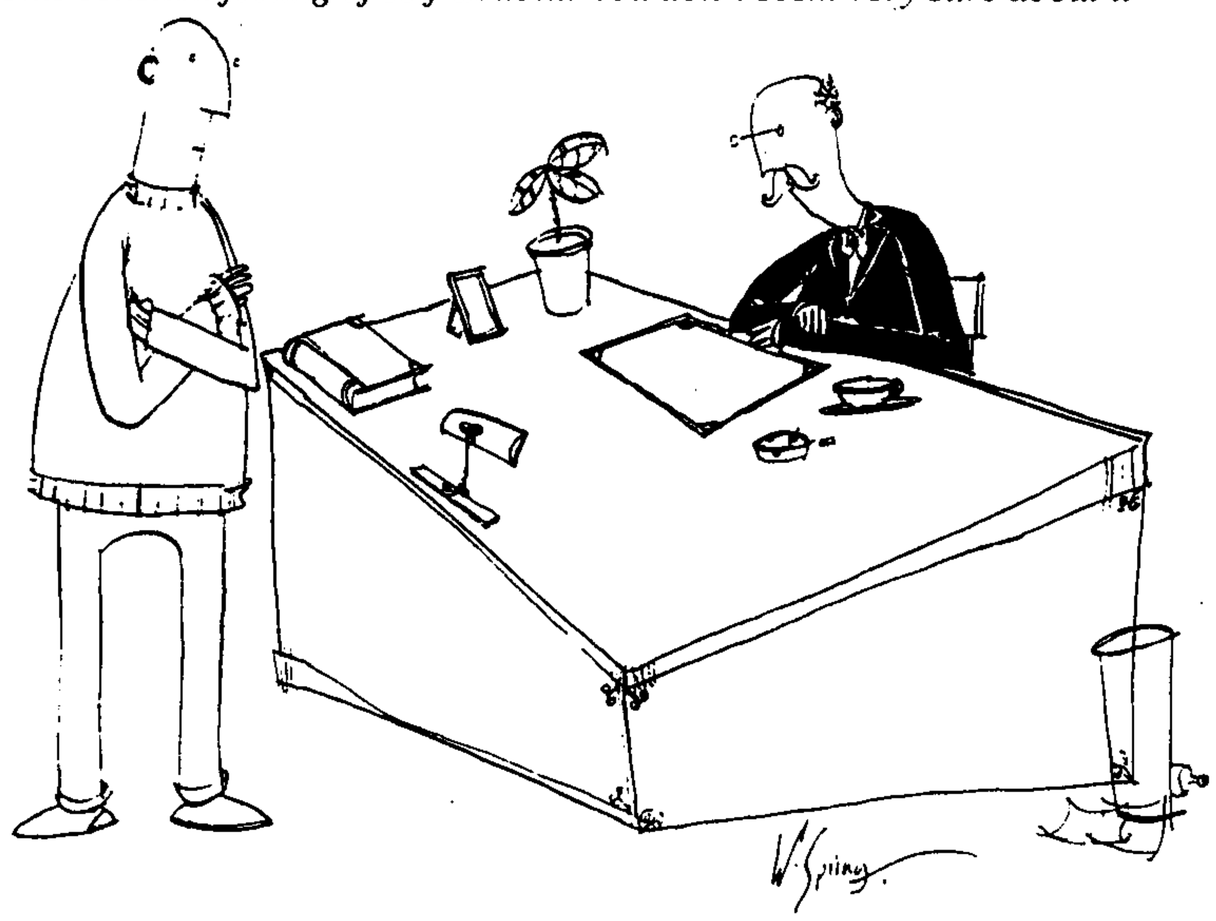
The ability of doctors to hide their addictions stems from a combination of intelligence, professional status, peer loyalty and lack of insight. Those who are aware they have a problem are also mindful of coming forward because, according to Dr Clive Froggat: "There is no effective support system available. Your whole livelihood is threatened and there is little effort put into rehabilitation. So an awful lot of sick doctors are just allowed to practise by their colleagues."

Froggat, for whatever motive, has been very public about his addiction since he was exposed in 1995. He started with cannabis as a medical student and progressed to cocaine and heroin in 1989. He got the former on the black market and the latter out of his bag, and for years hid the problem from his wife and partners until a Cheltenham pharmacist became "deeply suspicious about my prescribing habits". A month later, there was a very public dawn raid on his house.

Dr Ian Joiner is a recovering alcoholic who still practises as a GP. He has a drinking history spanning 35 years from medical school, peaking at four bottles of gin a week and four drink-driving offences. Dr Joiner was placed under psychiatric supervision for seven years by the GMC and now runs the Addicted Physicians Programme from his front room in Farnham, Surrey. "Recently I spoke to a doctor who was a cardiac surgeon and who was drinking half a bottle of vodka a day so he could steady his hands before an operation. He was unable to take my advice and he's still out there."

Dr Joiner set up his service in 1995, funded entirely by donations from users, because he was disillusioned by the help offered by the medical establishment. The occupational health service in the NHS is scandalously poor, and it's left to a patchy "three wise men" procedure in hospital and on local medical committees to sort out problem doctors and protect the public. The National Counselling Service for Sick Doctors offers an informal route to psychiatric services which, in the current climate of the NHS, often fail to provide the necessary supervision to rehabilitate doctors.

"This constant feeling of self-doubt... You don't seem very sure about it"



The General Medical Council has ultimate responsibility to protect patients, but currently just 140 out of the 13,000 addicts are practising under the GMC's supervision. The GMC's view is that, while recognising it only sees the tip of the iceberg, the local procedures work well to sort out addicted doctors and that it's not something the public should worry about. Clive Froggat takes a different view. "If there are 13,000 addicted doctors making 2,000 clinical decisions each year, that's 26 million decisions each year made by addicts."

In truth, it's hard to find evidence of wholesale patient harm at the hands of addicted doctors: 80 percent of a GP's caseload is self-limiting illness that it's hard to misdiagnose, and it may well be that many addicted doctors would pass competency exams. However, drunk surgeons are truly frightening, as is the reticence of their colleagues to report them. Earlier this year a fatal accident inquiry at which it was alleged a consultant surgeon operated under the influence of alcohol led to calls to breathalyse surgeons. Pilots and train drivers have to do it, and if the profession doesn't sort itself out, doctors may follow suit.

The BMA has set up an action group in Scotland for problem drinkers, but seems to have resigned itself that what's really needed — a humane working environment and a good occupational health service — may never happen. Last month the BMA gave a huge vote of confidence to the NHS by sending its members details of BUPA personal health care with preferential discounts. So now we can all get pissed in private. Merry Christmas.

M.D.

SIGNAL FAILURES

Focus on connections

THE debate on integrated transport policy initiated by John Prescott seems premature given that the rail system isn't capable of coordinating with itself, let alone with buses, cars, ferries and other forms of transport.

A rail network (as opposed to a collection of isolated railways) should enable passengers to travel swiftly between any two stations even where there is no direct train. But Britain's privatised railway has abandoned this principle. If a train arrives late, the chances are that its "connecting" service will have left already.

Yet again the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising (Opraf) is to blame. Before it drafted the passenger service requirements (PSRs) for each franchise, Opraf promised that "allowances will be made for trains which are delayed in order to wait the arrival of specific connecting services". But, as the Rail Users Consultative Committee for Wales, a Tory-appointed watchdog, laments in its annual report: "Allowances had not been made in any PSR received by the committee. Provisions for connections are wholly inadequate in all PSRs received, provisions for delayed connections are unacceptably omitted from all PSRs... The committee expressed its deep concern at the manner in which Opraf progressively diluted its initial commitments and undertakings and by that jeopardised future travel opportunities for rail passengers."

The result is that people have missed ferry sailings to Ireland and suffered delays of up to 12 hours. The policy also hits commuters — like the *Eye* reader who travels from Chippenham to work in Oxford, changing at Didcot. "The train arrived at Didcot just in time for the Oxford train to pull out as we were all trying to cross the platform to it. The stationmaster said he hadn't been able to hold it," he wrote in a letter of complaint. He was half an hour late for work because Thames Trains was not prepared to hold the Oxford train even 30 seconds. Another time he was 90 minutes late because Great Western Trains had not held a train.

The non-connection policy is not limited to connections between different train operators. For every delayed train, the company responsible for the delay must pay a fine under the ludicrous penalty and bonus system devised to keep the fragmented rail network running. Delaying a train to await a late connecting service helps customers — but costs the train's operator money.

Previously, experienced staff held connections at their discretion, taking into account the likely number of people needing the connection, the length of time till the next service, how late the incoming service was running, etc. Occasionally they got it wrong, and it was to tackle such problems that the private sector, with its "superior" management skills was drafted in.

"We regret the delays and cancellations. These are due to the wrong type of people running the network. Thank you."

Now, however, we simply have a public service run to suit bureaucrats and managers with no regard to customers' needs at all. Opraf could easily exempt operators from fines for delays caused in the interest of connecting passengers, but it is too far removed from everyday life to understand the impact of its policies on passengers. If there must be fines, surely they should be on operators who do *not* hold connections?

If the fines and bonuses resulted in 99.9 percent of trains arriving on time, this connections issue would be immaterial. In practice trains are not significantly more punctual than they were under British Rail, despite the private rail companies receiving twice as much subsidy and despite the threat of fines.

● THOSE who claim the Connex South Eastern service is crap are closer to the truth than they might think. The new Networker trains are designed to carry sewage from onboard toilets in tanks beneath the carriages. Unlike older designs, these tanks are fitted with air vents. So as soon as anybody opens a carriage window the foul smell of sewage is blown on to hapless passengers. As the smell remains throughout the journey, more passengers open windows to get rid of it — making matters worse. Staff confronted by irate passengers claim the problem is compounded by the tanks being emptied less often to save money. This results in more toilets being out of order.

After a particularly unpleasant journey in August, one family wrote to Connex to complain. After a reminder, the company replied three months later, admitting the problem but promising chemicals would be put in the tanks to "absorb the noxious gases". The family of four was given £10 of travel vouchers.

Meanwhile, the company has given a passenger £5 in vouchers after she was charged £3.50 for a journey covered by her season ticket. "The supervisor at London Bridge has already spoken to the clerk who issued your ticket and he has apologised for the error, which occurred because he had left his glasses at home and misread your season ticket," said Connex.

'Dr B. Ching'

Rotten Boroughs

Newcastle

TEARS before bedtime when Labour's ruling commisars on Newcastle city council tried to decide where to stick a multi-million pound shopping and office development.

Council leader Tony Flynn was in the chair as, one by one, party members attacked eachother not very fraternally with accusations touching on the ethnicity and masonic allegiances of Flynn's majority group. Finally Flynn could take no more: his proud head sank to his apron and he broke down in tears.

"Perhaps we should adjourn for a 10-minute break?" suggested the token woman councillor present.

"Nah!" replied a male colleague. "I'd prefer to sit here and watch him cry."

Elsewhere there have been complaints about the appointment of Alastair Balls, chief executive of Tyne & Wear development corporation, to the £50,000-a-year chief executive's job at the International Centre for Life.

Coun Kevan Jones has written to Labour culture secretary Chris Smith saying he is concerned that a civil servant who has been closely involved in setting up the project and the trust which runs it should get its plum post.

"Clearly, if the track record of the Tyne & Wear development corporation is anything to go by, there will be little public scrutiny of spending £54m worth of taxpayers' money," he writes, before asking if the centre isn't just an expensive job club for ex-employees of the development corporation.

Glasgow

BIG-HEARTED Jimmy Wray, Labour MP for Glasgow Bailleston, was too generous when he lent money to Labour councillor Gaille McCann so she could pay off council rent arrears of £1,300, say city Tories. As a spokesman put it: "The Labour group took no action regarding her rent arrears, but when other tenants owe £370 they're told to pay up or else!"

Over the last two years McCann has been at the centre of allegations of financial irregularities involving urban aid projects in Easterhouse, a vast estate where she earns — on top of her council wage — £18,000 as a community health projects officer.

With her husband, who works for a tenants' initiative, the couple have joint income of £40,000 a year and have just bought a house (in the private sector).

Camden

A FINANCE officer in Camden has been allowed to leave with a £12,000 cheque and a clean sheet despite being found guilty of five charges of gross misconduct.

The work-shy employee granted himself an extra seven weeks' leave last year. But the council said he could go with a pay-off and clean slate as faults also lay with his manager (who has left with a £60,000 cheque!)

West Dunbartonshire

FOLLOWING the *Eye* story about West Dumbarton Activity Centre which can't account for £140,000, more public money has gone down the drain in Dumbarton.

Auditors checking the books of last summer's Lomond and Clyde Festival found security guards called Mr Brown, Mr Black and Mr White (very *Reservoir Dogs*), not forgetting "Hugh Grant" and "Sally McCoist" — the nickname of histrionic Rangers footballer Ally McCoist.

Council officers have spent three months and wasted thousands trying to trace these characters, and the Scottish office is now investigating.

Security was in fact handled by Martin Hollern (real name) who, funnily enough, is the uncle of the organising committee secretary. By an amazing coincidence he is also a board member of the scandal-ridden West Dumbarton Activity Centre.

Kent

SANDY Bruce-Lockhart, Tory leader of Kent county council who denied the *Eye*'s accusation that his council would be making cuts and said he would be "reinstating cuts implemented by the previous Lib/Lab administration", is now, er, making cuts proposed by the Lib/Labs to save £38m.

Sadly he must find another £42m savings in 1998-9; and so great is the crisis, he has had to promise there will be no job losses at head office to get the cuts through.

One cost-cutting decision is to sell 31 old people's homes. The council commissioned Chesterton's to survey the properties, but its report was kept secret when the social services committee considered the sell-off. Though promises were made that the report would be released when KCC discussed the sale in full council, the Chesterton's findings have not yet officially seen the light of day.

Could this be because the firm suggests getting rid of admin staff and cramming in more beds to make the homes more profitable for new private owners? Or because it says daycare should be abandoned in favour of more long-term accommodation? Surely not.

Junket of the Week

BAD news for Merthyr Tydfil, whose mayor Tom Lewis, council leader Ray Thomas and head of leisure (*sic*) Adrian Barwood went on a week's holiday — sorry: a tough fact-finding mission — to Santo Tirso, Portugal, last summer, but to no avail.

Merthyr, already twinned with the drab Paris suburb of Clichy la Garenne, was investigating the possibility of a twin somewhere sunnier. Alas, as Coun Thomas explained, getting European grants for twinning is a minefield. "I had hoped it would open up a pot of cash to send groups from Merthyr over to our twin towns but that is unlikely to happen."

This might be because Merthyr is an industrial town of 42,500 people largely employed in manufacturing and service industries, while Santo Tirso is a rural village of 13,000 whose only industries are chocolates and textiles.

Lambeth

THE investigation into the gas explosion at Kerrin Point tower block in Lambeth has revealed many faults across the borough.

Engineering experts Ove Arup examined council boilerhouses and found 356 instances where gas regulations are being breached. Ninety five boilerhouses had no fire extinguisher and 37 no log book. In total 34 boilers need urgent work to make them safe. So far Lambeth's incompetence has injured 11; caused more than 100 people to lose their homes; and cost £2m and rising. Who should take responsibility is yet to be determined.

Meanwhile, councillors are slashing grants to four law centres, which will have to close, having recently closed the housing benefit complaints section. Not that the council will regret closing the North Lambeth law centre: it advised Kerrin Point tenants on their rights and how they could be compensated for Lambeth's incompetence.

Islington

TONY BLAIR's former ward councillor in Islington, James Winston, has been found guilty at Southwark crown court of fraudulently obtaining £8,000 of housing benefit after he was caught claiming it simultaneously from Haringey and Islington.

Elected as a Labour councillor in May 1994 in Blair's Barnsbury ward, Winston resigned from the party to fight the allegations, which he initially denied. However, the court heard how Winston claimed £400 HB a month for accommodation in Haringey which a friend let him stay in rent free. Winston then submitted two further claims from addresses in Islington. The disgraced councillor will only have to do 80 hours of community service.

Pseuds Corner

"It's not too far-fetched to believe that at a deep level the appeal of the hamburger is 'Mummy and Daddy'. You have the power and sexual potency in the beef all of which is encased in that huge, soft, billowy, breast-like bun."

The Food Programme, Radio 4

During the Sixties, everyone was welcome and we'd be drinking cocktails with Twiggy and Zandra Rhodes, and the children would run around, like a big picnic in fairyland. I liked my children meeting pivotal people of the 20th century.

MOLLY PARKIN
Daily Mail

DOUBLE LIFE at the Waiting Room, a new exhibition space for contemporary art, veneered ceilings, concrete patios. '70s brutalism that only adds to the mix of trashed-out, jet-lagged, bad techno, schiz-analysis that the new British art of the late '90s represents. In these works desire is given back at a cost, its symbolic order at zero point. The face in the mirror stares back, the voice issuing from the mouth speaks back. What is accepted is neither our own nor another's. A double movement, that Godard had once related to cinema, which projects us toward others while taking us inside ourselves, is now physically disrupted. The art of this time is measured by the "subject that has no subject" at critical mass. We find ourselves exploded in one movement, fired far from Godard's ethic: "ce n'est pas une image juste, c'est juste une image"; in the other, we are imploded further into it.

'DOUBLE LIFE' Exhibition
University of Wolverhampton

I make my own culture and tend to lean towards the extreme in taste, mood, behaviour, and so on, but everyone's idea of extreme is different. I look on my sheepdog-handling demonstrations as a primitive ballet where nature provides the setting and my whistles are a musical accompaniment.

VIV BILLINGHAM, Shepherdess
The Guardian

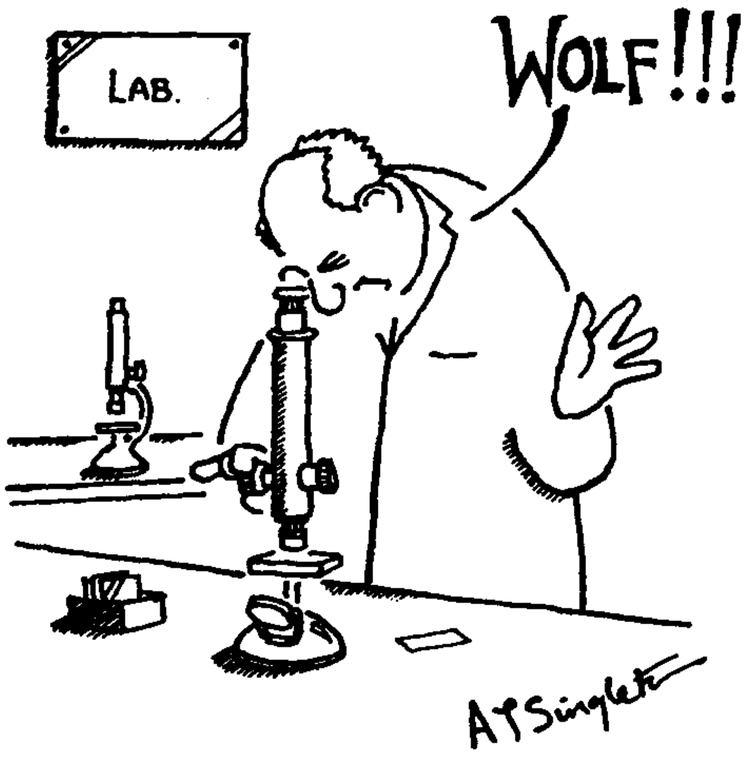
You are not...
...overly formal, stuffy, a bully, negative, a person who starts but doesn't see things through, slow, departmentally focused, a recluse and rarely seen, introvert, inaccessible, poor on delegation.

You are...
...affable, open minded, inclusive, charismatic, credible, an ambassador, visionary, informal, heavily partnership focused, resilient, heavy on intellectual and managerial rigour, honest, tells it like it is, politically astute, tough and able to stand your ground, inspiring, energetic, enthusiastic, winning, positive, totally strategic and corporate in your thinking, community focused, highly visible and very accessible.

Job Advertisement for Chief Exec of London Borough of Hillingdon

CONTRIBUTORS: Catherine Briddick, Janice James, Arthur Cravan, Laura Golding, Anon.

£10 paid for entries



DOWN ON THE FARM

IT would be wrong to suggest that "Mad Doctor" John Cunningham did not consult anyone before whistling into law his Beef Bones Regulations 1997, which make it a criminal offence punishable by unlimited imprisonment for a British butcher to sell a rib of beef or to give a customer a bone for the dog.

The public may think this the Silliest Law Ever Issued By A British Government, but, according to a notice put out by his officials, no fewer than 400 organisations were invited to comment on the regulations, er, in the four days between their being published and their becoming law.

A scan down the list shows the kind of experts whose views Dr T. Bone sought. The organisations included: the Al-Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre; the Association of Circus Proprietors; the Muslim College; the Network of Sikh Organisations; the Confederation of African Organisations; the North of England Mule Sheep Society; the Islamic Cultural Centre; the Goat Advisory Bureau; the Imams and Mosques Council UK; Ian Greer Associates; the Ile de France Sheep Society; the Board of Deputies of British Jews; the European Documentation Centre; the British Ceramics Federation; the British Commercial Rabbit Association; the British In Vitro Diagnostics Association; the British Fur Trade Association; the Eppyut Hill and Beulah Face Sheep Society; Croda Chemicals; the Chemical Industries Association — and almost every other eminent body one could think of.

Obviously it must have been an oversight that the "consultees" did not include any organisations representing the people most likely to be affected by the new order: the cattle breeders themselves, such as the Aberdeen Angus, Charolais, Hereford and other societies. Indeed, standing out like a sore thumb among the representatives of Britain's ethnic communities and chemical manufacturers, almost the only organisation speaking for the beef breeder was the National Cattle Association.

But the agriculture secretary was not really interested in the views of any of these bodies. When the clever SEAC scientists came up with their "evidence" that there was a one in 1,200,000,000 chance of anyone in Britain catching CJD from eating oxtail soup in 1998, they presented him with two options: either to debone meat from cattle over 24 months; or to ban beef on the bone altogether. The reason Cunningham went for option two was that, as he solemnly explained to Tony Blair, if he did not take "the toughest action", he might lose his "credibility" with our "EU partners" and all his careful moves to get an end to the EU ban on British beef might be in ruins.

The penny does not seem to have dropped that there isn't the faintest chance of getting that ban lifted this side of the year 3000. Meanwhile, it's Britain's beef industry which is in ruins thanks to the explosion of cheap imports from other EU countries which British taxpayers are helping to subsidise. But with a bit of luck all T-Bone's problems will soon be solved. In six months' time there will be virtually no British beef farmers left to worry about and our "partners" will have that "level playing field" all to themselves.

'Even Newer Muckspreader'

Letters

Private Eye

Food for thought?

Sir,

*The news of cows udders masquerading as "prime beef" being imported for a leading hamburger chain as reported by Muckspreader (*EYE *939) is no surprise.*

During the last few weeks, I and several other local farmers "staked-out" (excuse the pun) Belfast docks to try and stop any imported beef coming in. This did not make headline news for some reason, as it did across the water.

My colleagues and I managed to stop a French truck from the ferry terminal and had a look inside. Guess what we found? Cases of beef for "a leading hamburger chain" — however the documents listed the contents of the consignment as bullock's scrotums (or should I say scrota) from Italy!

Well, I hope you and all the staff at the EYE *all have an udderly Happy Christmas and New Year.*

ULICK MAGEE,

Portballintrae, Co. Antrim.

Fat of the land

Sir,

What Even Newer Muckspreader did not explain about those German cows' udders was just why our beefburger merchants might want to import them in the first place. Since the Hogg/EU ban on eating any cattle over 30 months old, the meat from younger animals does not contain enough fat to hold the burgers in shape. So fat must be added in the processing factories. The soft fat from cows' udders is just the job.

OLD MACDONALD.

Address unknown. (I used to have a farm, but I've been put out of business by those cheap Irish imports.)

Not mocked

Sir,

Your five Nativity cartoons in Christmas issue 939 were by any standards excessive and to my mind distasteful without being funny. Are there not enough humbugs, swindlers, whores, perverts and politicians in modern Britain to feel the lash of your satire, without going out of your way to mock the Prince of Peace? I am not particularly religious, but I think that some subjects are sacrosanct. When will you grow up, you fuggin' prats?

With bitterest recriminations,
ANDREW BLUHM,

Thames Ditton, Surrey.

Musically challenged

Sir,

We may well be quick to criticise the valiant young ladies from New Labour College ("Those Paxman questions the girls couldn't answer", EYE *939), but what of Paxman's knowledge of music?*

I refer to the second of the three bonus questions on Russian music, where a snippet of a percussion piece (including American siren) by the Frenchman Varese (written post-WWII) was passed off by Paxman as a pre-WWI masterpiece by Stravinsky!

Could it be that Paxman knows nothing about music and is himself embarrassing?

Bring back Bambi!

Yours,
EUGENE POZNIAK,

via e-mail.

All that glitters

Sir,

Re: Neil Kerber's Supermodels cartoon featuring Gary Glitter, EYE *938. Kerber's flippant pun seemed to me to be an attempt to get a cheap laugh out of the none-too-comic subject of child pornography. (Unless, that is, I've got it all wrong, and we* **weren't** *in fact meant to titter at his "clever" play on words.)*

Equally importantly: as for Gary Glitter, isn't he supposed to be innocent until proven guilty?

With season's greetings,
MATTHEW KEUTENIUS,

Kingston Upon Thames, Surrey.

Lookalike

Smithers

Smith

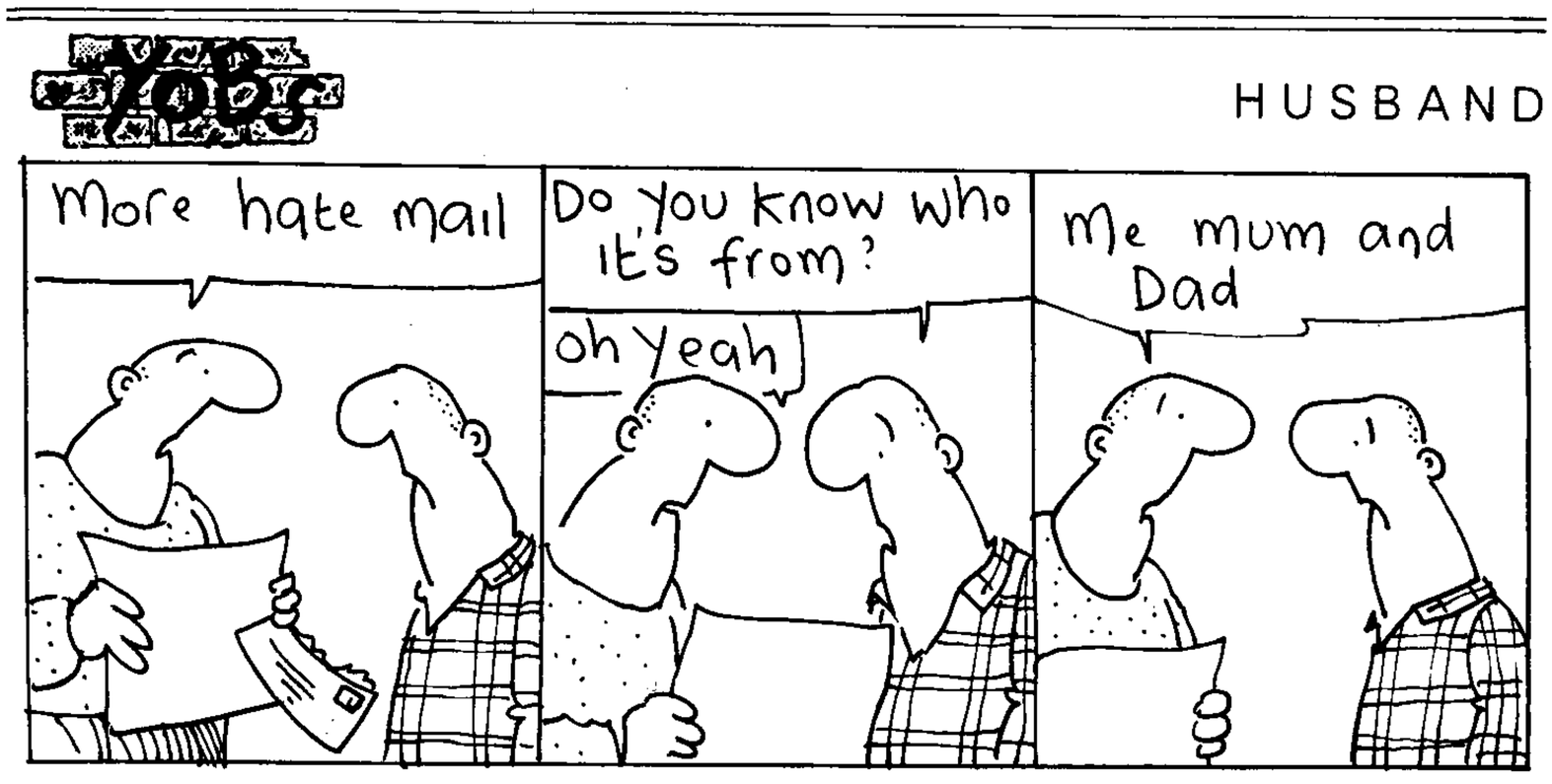
Sir,

Have any of your other readers noticed the uncanny resemblance between Waylon Smithers from THE SIMPSONS *— loyal servant to an evil, power crazed boss whom he secretly fancies — and Chris Smith, Culture Tzar?*

Yours faithfully,
JAMES OLIVER,

Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

PS: I feel it unnecessary to add that Robin Cook looks like Groundskeeper Willie from that programme…



Leigh, Day today

Sir,

We are humbled by the continued support your magazine and Muckspreader, in particular, gives to us ("Down on the Farm").

In your piece you were quite correct in pointing out that we had been shot to number one in the legal aid costs Hit Parade when some vindictive type in the Cardinal Wolsey Department decided to put all of the costs paid out over some five years in the Sellafield childhood leukaemia action into one year. I am sure that when Derry (as we legal arselickers like to call him) next appears on HAVE I GOT NEWS *you will put him straight.*

With regard to our success rate, you may be surprised to hear that, in fact, we have won the odd case this year, such as:

1 *Obtaining compensation for a young family whose home had, unknown to them, been built on a contaminated waste site by a well-known builder and devalued by the accumulation of methane gas beneath it.*

2 *Successfully representing Diane Blood.*

3 *Settling a personal injury claim against the British multinational Thor Chemicals for £1.3m on behalf of 20 South African workers poisoned by mercury.*

4 *Winning the right in the House of Lords for a Scottish throat cancer victim to sue Rio Tinto Zinc in England, in relation to his having worked at their uranium mine in Namibia.*

5 *Successfully preventing the closure of community hospitals in Lynton and Winford, North Devon.*

6 *Forcing Lambeth council to provide suitable education for children out of school.*

7 *Obtaining compensation for an AIDs victim who had contracted TB while in hospital.*

8 *Gaining compensation for a series of catastrophically injured babies.*

I appreciate this is all rather disappointingly earnest and we are taking steps to address this problem.

You rightly make sympathetic reference to the fact that my partner, Martyn Day, can only afford to live in Lewisham. Martyn managed to hoodwink the rest of us into pursuing one of his "losers" on a "no win no fee" basis, and if those claims against the tobacco companies are lost we may all end up as his neighbours. God forbid!

Your continued support and concerns are much appreciated.

RICHARD MEERAN,

Leigh, Day & Co Solicitors, London EC1.

On the railwayzzzzzzz...

Sir,

Re: Railway recovery time,

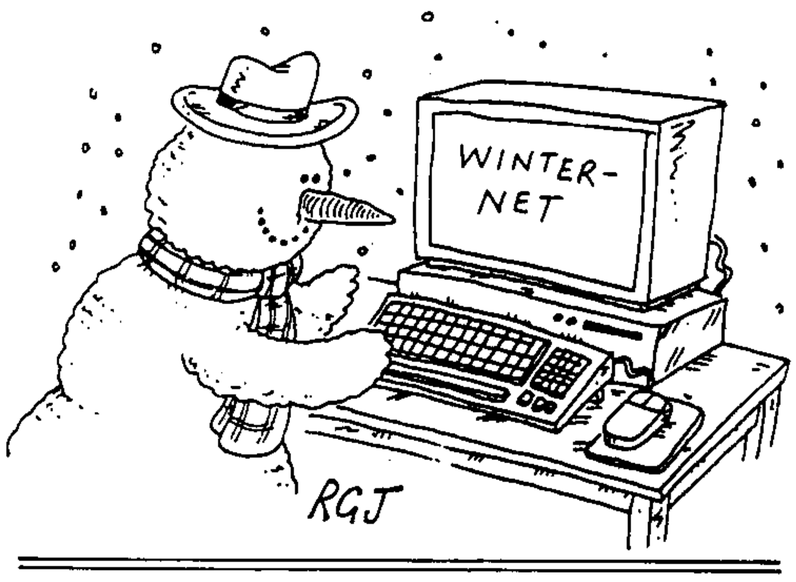
You are all missing the real point, which is that nobody asks the **customers** *to make an intelligent choice. By which I mean that anybody can get people to say they want trains to be fast, and anybody can get people to say they want trains to be reliable, but does anyone ever ask how they want speed and reliability balanced? Oh no.*

Questionable distribution of margin for recovery in schedules is nothing new, and neither is Pavlovian resistance to attempts to challenge it. What is new is the present level of inconsistency. I complain about trains from Birmingham arriving early because nearly everyone on them is going to London and the service to them is being cynically undersold. Schedule-padding approaching Leeds from London may be of reverse concern to the many people wanting Doncaster and Wakefield as the service to them is consequently faster.

What we should be asking, across the board, is whether people want fast schedules which mean arriving later some of the time or padded schedules which mean arriving later all of the time? I know which I prefer. Research suggests that most people agree, and that so long as reliability holds up to a reasonable 90 percent, they will vote with their fares for schedules to be fast.

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL OAKLEY,

Sutton Coldfield, W. Midlands.



Sayers says...

Sir,

I refer to your 14 November edition of PRIVATE EYE *and the column entitled "Rotten Boroughs, Fight of the Week... He now claims Sayers made anti-semitic remarks to him."*

I deny making any such remarks and would expect you to put the record straight by publishing a retraction of the offensive sentence hyphened above.

Yours sincerely,
CLLR JACK SAYERS,

London NW2.

A Kwik word

Sir,

We refer to an article in PRIVATE EYE *headed "The Hoods' Samaritan" (937, 14 November 1997). This piece included a number of incorrect statements.*

In the story you say that Mr and Mrs Hood owe £2,000 to Kwik-Fit. In fact, Mr and Mrs Hood have a credit agreement with the company that provides credit for Autocharge customers. Mr and Mrs Hood do not, and never have, owed money to Kwik-Fit.

You go on to say that Sandra Blake of the Citizens Advice Bureau ("CAB") wrote to Kwik-Fit. To the contrary, Ms Blake has confirmed to us in writing that CAB has never written to Kwik-Fit in relation to this matter.

You conclude the article by stating that the response of Kwik-Fit's debt managers was to request payment of £2 a week. Since any debt would have been debt owing to the company that provided credit for Autocharge customers, it is therefore wholly incorrect to refer to an offer being made on behalf of Kwik-Fit. Further, by the time your piece was published (14 November), I understand that the matter had been resolved to the satisfaction of Mr and Mrs Hood, something which you could easily have checked with Kwik-Fit, the credit providers of Mr and Mrs Hood.

Accordingly, your questioning of Sir Tom Farmer's Christian principle is based on incorrect facts.

I am confident that the company which provides credit for Autocharge customers fully appreciates the financial difficulties that a small number of account holders can face and reviews each case sympathetically on an individual basis.

Yours faithfully,
PETER HOLMES,

Managing Director, Kwik-Fit (GB) Ltd.

Losing hearts

Sir,

*I read with interest MD's article (*EYE *936) which states that King George Hospital in Ilford has an 18 month waiting list — even for heart surgery.*

I would like to point out that no patient at this hospital has had to wait for surgery for 18 months in over 4 years. In addition, as we do not carry out heart surgery our "waiting list" is non-existent!

I fear MD will have to sharpen his scythe and clean his stethoscope in order to detect and diagnose true fact from unsubstantiated fiction.

Yours sincerely,
STUART A.J. BAIN,

Chief Executive, Redbridge Health Care.

Cease ire

Sir,

So Hislop is off signing copies of the PRIVATE EYE ANNUAL *at W.H. Smith, is he? (Eye 939). Is this the same W.H. Smug much castigated (and rightly so!) at the time of the withdrawal of the Diana issue? We should be told.*

Yours faithfully,
DAVID HUGHES,

Southport.

PS: Is it now safe for EYE *readers to resume relations with Smith/Smug?*

● ***Apparently so. The Editor has been assured that the Diana business was er... "a misunderstanding". W.H Smith is now very keen to sell*** PRIVATE EYE ***to its customers and was delighted to welcome the Eye into its branch at King's Cross station. Two cheers for Smugs!***

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"I do not want to put labels around his [Joe Cole's] head and nooses around his neck that he cannot live up to."
TONY CARR, West Ham Youth Team Manager
(Piers Cañadas)

"In a sense it's a one-man show... except there are two men involved, Hartson and Berkovic, and a third man, the goalkeeper."
JOHN MOTSON, BBC1
(Mark Roberts)

"It's going to be a particularly hairy game from now on... now they've got that goal under their tails."
JOE ROYAL, Channel 5
(Mark Roberts)

"He's been a constant threat in Chelsea's thorn."
Commentator, Channel 5
(P. Smithson)

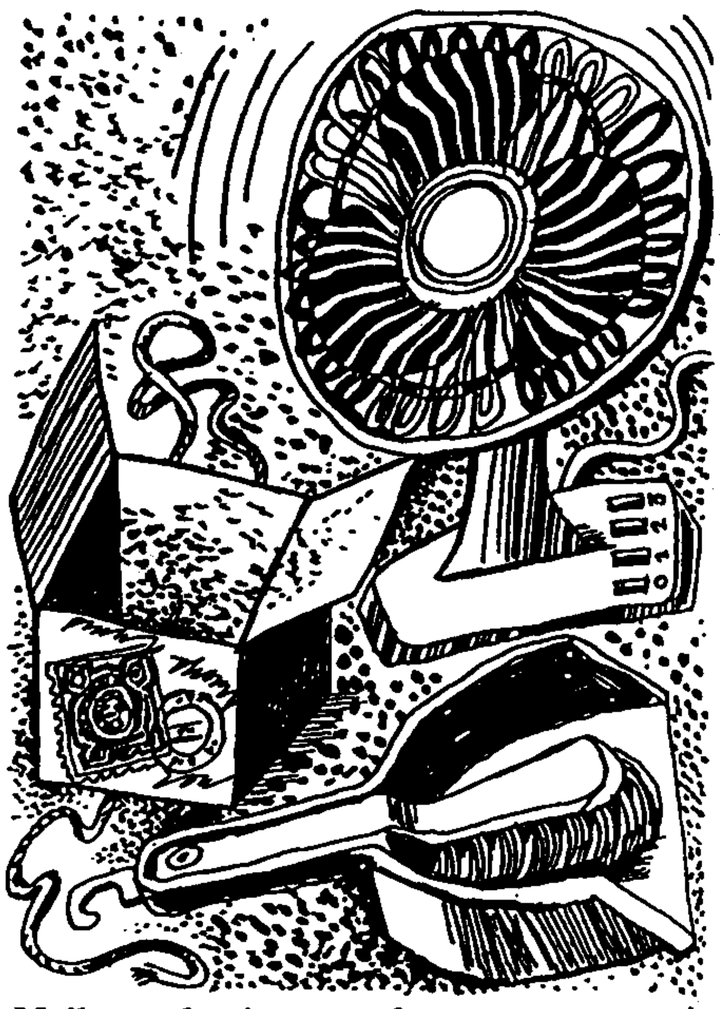
HOM SAP

BY DAVID AUSTIN

FUNNY OLD WORLD

O "It was a very hot day, so naturally we had the electric fan turned full on," Ms Teresita Castro explained to reporters gathered in Manila's main post office. "It's just unfortunate that it was blowing directly onto the inspection desk at the exact moment Moiloo opened the container."

Ms Castro (supervisor of the Philippines Post Office's Air and Sea Parcel section) was responding to a complaint about the handling of a package posted in Osaka, Japan. "All packages from abroad have to be inspected, and when Mr Mahinay called to collect this one, he didn't tell us that it contained his sister's ashes.



Moiloo, who is one of our most experienced checkers, removed the top of the container and, before he realised what was happening, the fan had sent Victoria Mahinay's ashes flying all round the office. Moiloo told me that it was like being inside one of those snowstorm toys.

"He turned the fan off and waited until the ashes settled, then swept the floor and emptied the dust pan into the container. But I have to admit that most of what he tipped back in was dirt and sawdust. It wasn't Miss Mahinay at all. Mr Mahinay could see that too, and he turned very nasty and said he'd be making an official complaint. I said I was only doing my job and that it was all done for his security and convenience. Technically, he still owes the post office 250 pesos in excess postage, but under the circumstances we have decided to waive the charge. Moiloo has given up smoking since the incident. The sight of ash now makes him vomit." *(The Straits Times, 27/8/97. Spotter: Chris Boughton)*

—O—

O "Hello my loyal readers. Park Choon-ho here with another 'Talking About Toilets' column. Did you know about an unusual event that took place in Hamamatsu, Japan, in 1877? It was a 'wind-breaking' contest, perhaps a unique one in the history of the world. Twenty-four champions demonstrated the art of breaking wind for eight hours. The top prize was 18 litres of sake, 5 kilograms of potato, a sack of sticky rice, a flute, and 10 pairs of straw sandals.

"The top winner was quoted as having said: 'I have always wanted to do something other people couldn't. When young, I was asked to try breaking wind. But the technique has a tradition which goes back to the times of the first shogunate, Ieyasu Tokugawa (1543-1616), who regarded it as something quite natural, and even promoted it. A champion wind-breaker must perform any one of five categories, including one called "Snake and Frog", which imitates the sound a frog makes when a snake attacks'..." [to be continued] *(The Korea Times, 30/09/97 Spotter: Anon)*

—O—

O *"Perlis International Snake Charming Competition, Kangar.*

"All participants in this competition, which begins tomorrow at the Stadium Datuk Sheikh Ahmad, will be required to sign indemnity forms, absolving the organisers from any untoward incidents. This has become necessary because, following an incident in June when Rahim Taha received a fatal bite from a cobra during the State Snake Charmers event, no insurance company is willing to arrange liability cover.

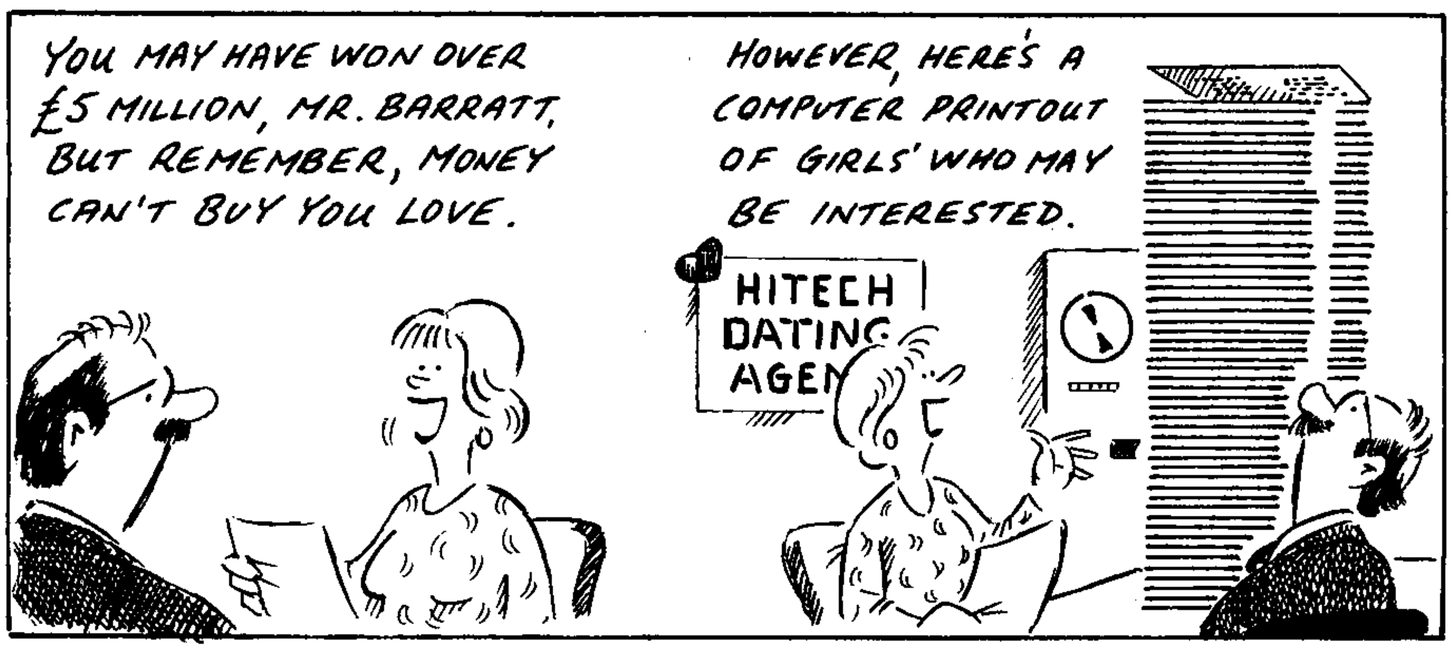
"In accordance with tradition, we shall continue to use only snakes which have not had their venom removed. But, as a safety precaution, the audience is advised not to cough or sneeze while watching the competition.

"Cheering is out of the question. Flash photography is permitted however. By order of the chairman, Zulkifli Arshad." (New Straits Times, 13/9/97. Spotter: P. Nicholls)

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

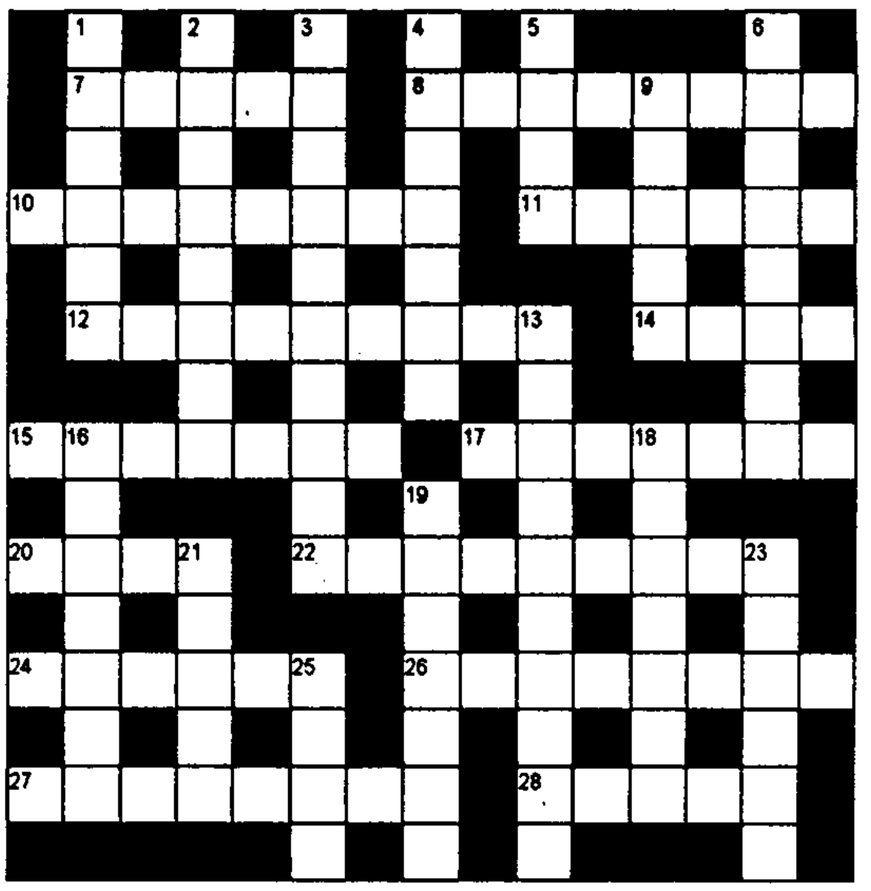
The Lottery Winners

TURNER


YOU MAY HAVE WON OVER £5 MILLION, MR. BARRATT, BUT REMEMBER, MONEY CAN'T BUY YOU LOVE.
HOWEVER, HERE'S A COMPUTER PRINTOUT OF GIRLS' WHO MAY BE INTERESTED.
HITECH DATING AGEN

EYE CROSSWORD 95

by Cyclops *£100 prize*



ACROSS

7 During sex, pelicans kick out (5)
8 A certain sort of porn under the surface in our streets? (8)
10 Old queen with feathers having a game with one (8)
11 Pussy — the Alan Clark type? (6)
12/9/17/21 A comment on Noel's poor record of relief, as they say at the present time (9,5,3,4,1,4)
14 House partly responsible for BSE: minister (4)
15 Not much of Balmoral's exterior is going down (4,3)
17 (see 12)
20 A group of alcoholics including two euphemistic bastards and a pop group (4)
22 Punch comically represented to Brenda vulgar source of political strength (5,4)
24 Country habit, getting pissed between end of August and start of September? (6)
26 Hormones tire sods out! (8)
27 Work out what preoccupies a student (8)
28 A real goer in the sixties, this representative drug taker (1-4)

DOWN

1 Gallant creep abandons heroin chic (6)
2 Labour made more bearable by such an administration! (8)
3 Dolly possibly after Boycott's relatively disreputable member (5,5)
4 One service provided by those people grasping appendage (3,4)
5 Prince: one-time wanker (4)
6 Like coming out of Argos possibly with miniaturised broadcasting aid (8)
9 (see 12)
13 Conservative ogles our reviewer (6,4)
16 Funny woman makes Stone get tumescent (4,3)
18 Sod all right with key Conservative, speaking rhetorically? (7)
19 Awful wind, this fiddler! (7)
21 (see 12)
23 Disturbances on the surface of Governor George? (6)
25 Vasectomy surgery on penis pointless? (4)

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 31.12.97. Entries to "Crossword", Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 94

Winner: JOHN SAUNDERS

ACROSS: 6 Unlawful 8 Aussie 10/11 Nelson Mandela 11 (see 10) 12/23ac Spin doctor 13 Chancellor 14 Flaccid 16 Archery 19 Prima donna 21 Dodo 22 Soloist 23 (see 12) 24 Sextet 25 Mafeking.

DOWN: 1 Interpol 2 Lawson 3 Plum jam 4 Magna Carta 5 Virago 7 Fun 9 Stealth 13 Childbirth 15 Camelot 17 Radio One 18 Anatomy 20 Rasher 21 Decoke 23 Duff.

'GOOD APPLES IN FORCE' Knacker's shock claim

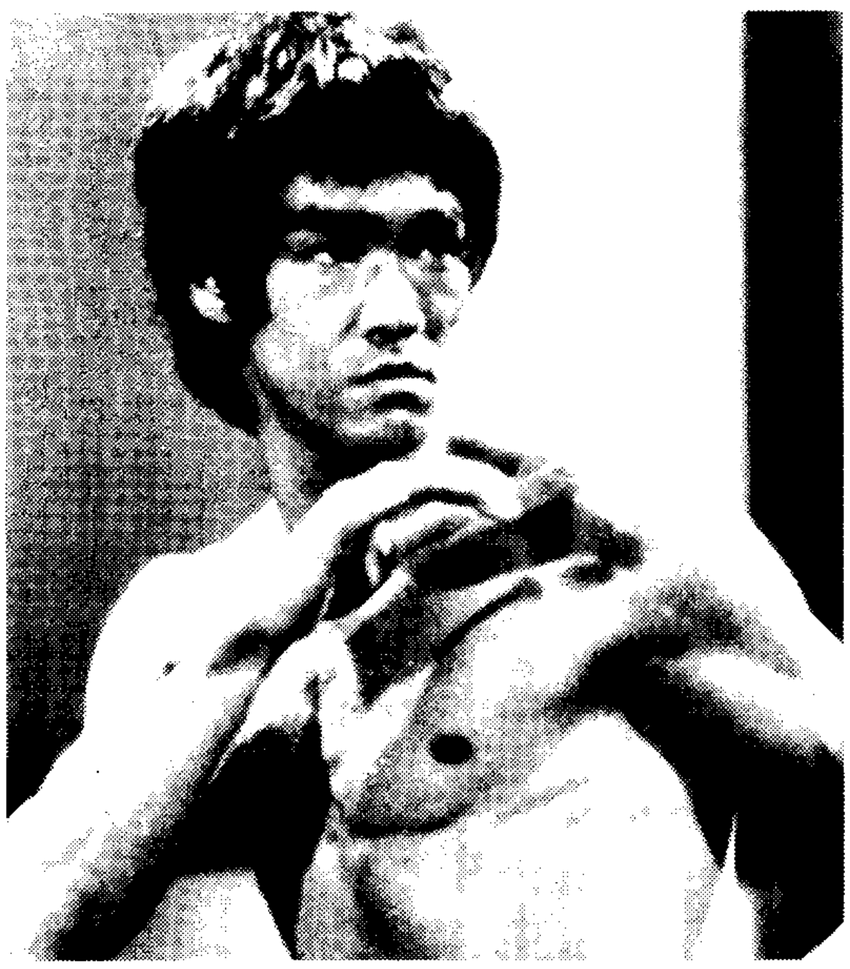
by Our Crime Staff **Nicked Ross**

"IT is the same in any organisation," said Inspector Knacker at a Scotland Yard press conference yesterday. "There are always a few people who insist on playing it by the book and doing their duty. But rest assured, gentlemen, we shall stop at nothing to root out these officers. There is no place for them in the modern police force."

The Inspector concluded: "I am now going to retire due to ill health and devote my life to bungee jumping for charity".

The Inspector is due to become Head of Security at Harrods for an annual salary of 500,000 copies of Punch *(surely 'pounds'? Ed.)*.

"Don't just sit there... chew something!"



David Niven stars in wartime classic They Flew To Bruges, *part of Channel 4's French Season, 2.30am Easter Day*

Pick Of The Season's Films

Family Choice

Holiday Friday 9.00am, BBC1

Reservoir Dwarves (1996)
Tarantino's brilliant homage to *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. Whoopi Goldberg is Snow White with Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sly Stallone, Jean Claude van Damme, Gene Hackman, Joe Pesci, Bruce Willis and John Travolta as the dwarves. Exciting climax to the action with a heavy-duty dwarf shoot-out in the witch's penthouse suite in Manhattan. *(125 minutes)*

Kiddies' Favourite

New Year's Eve Day
2.00pm, Channel 5

Shoot His Brains Out (1964)
Little-seen Clint Eastwood vehicle set in the Mexican borderlands. Clint is the mysterious drifter El Tel who kills 523 people before the titles. Score by Ernio Morcambandwiso. *(79 minutes)*

Children's Classic

New Year's Day Morning
7.00am, Channel 4

Bongo! (1969)
Michael Caine stars as Lieutenant Alan Clark of the Queen's Own Philanderers sent to quell the Bongo uprising in 1875. Star studded cast includes Wilfred Hyde White as Chief Bongolezi, leader of the legendary Bongo Warrior Tribe; Barbara Windsor as Queen Victoria; and Jim Dale as Disraeli. *(228 minutes)*

Best Of The Bunch

New Year's Day Evening
7.00pm, Carlton

They Flew To Bruges (1997)
Explosive Kung-Fu version of the British wartime classic originally starring David Tomlinson as Group Captain "Chalky" Sebag-Montefiore and Richard Attenborough as Gunner Wapshot. Directed by Fah-Kee Tup, the legendary martial arts master from Hong Kong, this version has the RAF mission to Bruges recast as a drugs delivery to Shanghai. Stars No-Too Good, Ho Plez, and Tun-Eee Toff. *(398 minutes)*

(That's enough terrible films. Ed.)

IN THE COURTS

Clark vs Hastings and the Evening Standard (Day 94)

THE CASE continued today in front of Mr Justice Cocklecarrot in which Rt Hon Alan Clark seeks to restrain himself from groping Mrs Edith Musgrove, 56, a court usher from Ealing *(surely 'restrain the Evening Standard from publishing a spoof account of his groping Mrs Edith Musgrove' Ed)*.

Sir Ephraim Cucumber Q.C. *(for Mr Clark)*: What were your feelings, Mr Clark, when you read this appalling parody of yourself in the Evening Standard dated July 7th, 1997? *(Holds up copy of Playboy)* I am sorry, your Honour, I appear to have the wrong bundle.

Cocklecarrot: It looks like a right bundle of fun to me, Sir Ephraim!

(Loud sycophantic laughter from barristers greets judge's feeble joke)

Sir Ephraim *(reading)*: "Terrific lunch. Got rather squiffy and made an arse of myself in the Commons. Made a pass at Betty Boothroyd (no luck) and did Hitler impersonation behind Major's back. Crashed Porsche doing 200mph down Lord North Street. Still, bit of luck in the hospital. Cracking dusky nurse from Bongo-Bongo land with tits the size of the Matterhorn. Blimey!"

(Laughter and cheers of "Good old Clarkie" fill court)

Clark: When I read this I of course thought I had written it. So did my friends and they all rang up to congratulate me on such a wonderfully funny piece.

Cucumber: No, no, no, Mr Clark. You're supposed to say that you were very upset and distressed to see yourself portrayed as a sex-crazed fascist drunk and loony.

Clark: Sorry. I had a bit of a heavy lunch with this cracking totty I met on the tube.

Cucumber *(hurriedly)*: No further questions.

Clark: I've got one. Has the judge got a wife and daughters? I've got nothing on this evening, or I won't have with a bit of luck.

(The Nutcase continues)

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

HULLO — AND A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR!

And when I say "new", that's what I mean!

New ideas! New opportunities! New thinking! And a new broom, sweeping through every corner of parish life!

As it says in the Good Book, "Look, I see everything new!" *(the Revelations of St Anthony, New Labour Bible).*

So, let's stop worrying about the old things of the past — like what Mr Lairg may or may not have done with Mrs Dewar 20 years ago. Or how much money Mr Robinson may have been given by his Belgian lady-friend.

That sort of thing is all firmly in the past! It's last year's news! It's old wine in old bottles (as the parable puts it so well!).

That's why it is so important for all of us to forget about the past and to look ahead to the New Year in the new St Albion's.

"Spread the Good News" was what our Lord said. Not the "Good Olds"!

Perhaps some of us should think about that for a moment.

Certainly, I am looking forward to all the exciting things we are planning for the New Year!

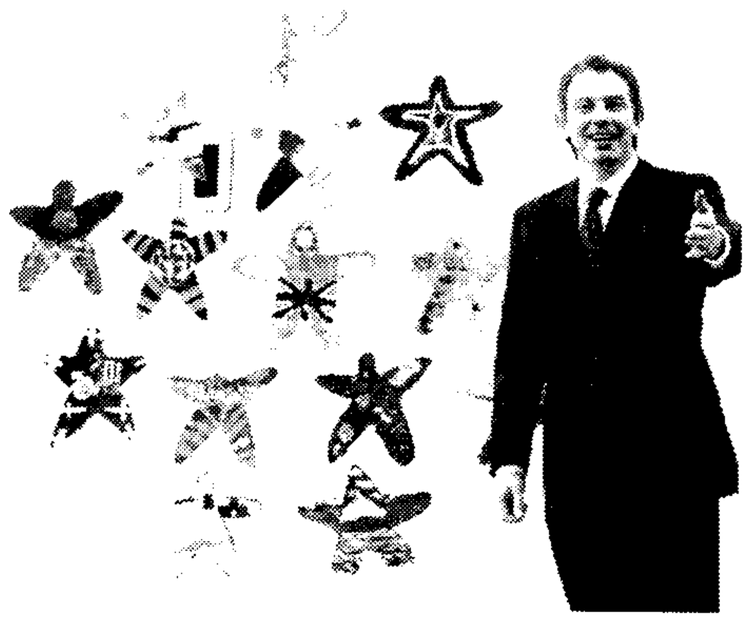
I have been invited to be the Chair of the European Ecumenical Council, the EEC, in which a group of "leaders" from all over Europe get together to pool all our ideas in a really constructive kind of way!

This is going to be my agenda for this "mini-Synod":

1. Get together
2. Pool our ideas
3. Be constructive

I asked the children of St Albion's Primary School reception class to design a special logo for our meeting.

There were a lot of super ideas as you can see:



The Vicar – What a star!

So, a lot to be getting on with in the New Year! Ring in the New! And ring out the Old! (Not "old people" obviously, although they have to start taking some responsibility for looking after themselves, along with the single mothers and the disabled!)

Cherie and I join together in wishing you a very new New Year!

Your friend,

Tony

++ *Around The Parish* ++

● Mrs Harman's talk on **"Why Single Mothers Don't Deserve Any More Handouts"** was a great success. Mrs Harman made her points very well. I am only sorry that a small minority of 47 people at the back of the hall made a row and tried to spoil it for everyone else. Mr Mandelson knows who they are and where they live! I am, of course, also sorry that I could not be there to support Mrs Harman, because I had a very important prior engagement which I could not break. Cherie and I had decided at the last minute to have a party at the vicarage, to thank some of our local celebrities for all they have given to life in the parish. We were particularly pleased to meet "Ginger" Evans, who has done so much with his work among the young people. He told us a very amusing story about taking off his trousers and being sick!

TB

Your Letters

Dear Sir,

It is all very well for the vicar and his friends to say that we shouldn't be giving money to single mothers this Christmas, but isn't it a bit rich for Mr Cook then to spend a fortune out of church funds on doing up his new office, so that he can entertain his new bit of

Yours faithfully
Brian Sedgemore,
Tribune Almshouse.

The editor Mr Campbell reserves the right to cut all letters for reasons of space.

Verses By A Local Poet

Let auld acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to mind.
Particularly those who don't like Tony
Mr Livingstone and his kind.

Tessa Jowell (Mrs) of the Women's Fellowship Group

THE CHURCHWARDEN MR MANDELSON WRITES:

Just before Christmas there was a very unpleasant incident outside the church, involving Mrs Harman, a highly-respected lady member of our PCC, and a gentleman from our local radio station Albion FM, Mr Humphrys. Apparently, this gentleman asked Mrs Harman a lot of very impertinent questions about church business, which Mrs Harman rightly couldn't answer. We have now informed Albion FM that in future no one from the PCC will be allowed to appear on Albion FM unless they are accorded proper respect and are allowed not to answer questions if they so desire. They have been warned!

PM

Cherie • Chris • Mas!!

(Very funny! TB)

Advertisement

OVER 60?

WORRIED ABOUT ILL-HEALTH?

We, none of us, want to be a burden on the community or on our beloved ones when we grow old. Why not consult us about making a "living will"? This allows you to hand over all your money to your loved ones who can then decide that you should die in dignity — thus saving the community a great deal of money.

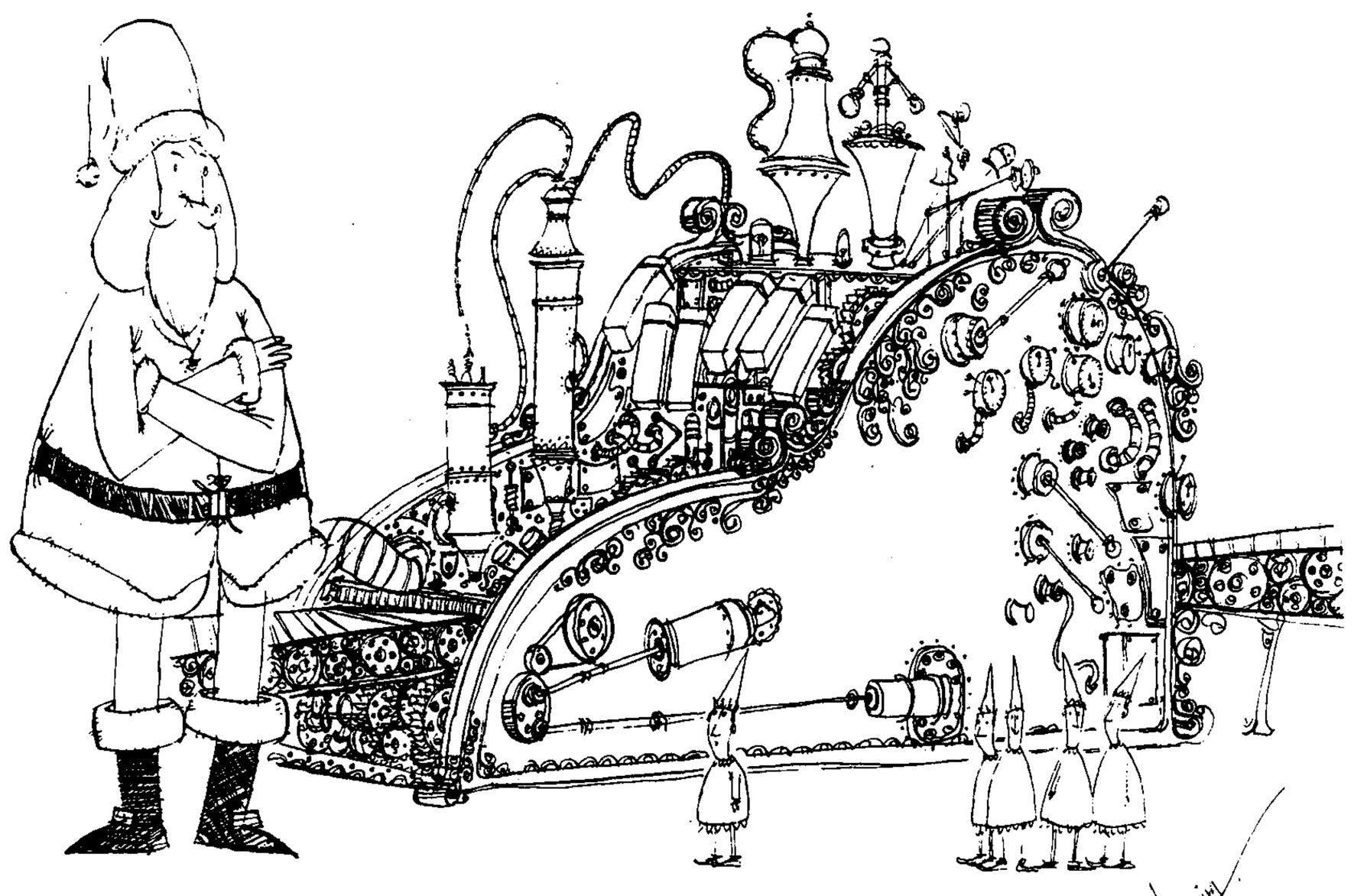
Apply to: LAIRG AND CO.
FAMILY SOLICITORS.
THE HIGH STREET, ST ALBION.

HUMPHRYS TO GO MISSING?

by Our Political Staff **Kitty Kelley**

AFTER years of getting his claws into the previous inhabitants of Number Ten Downing Street, Humphrys the stray broadcaster is in danger of being thrown out by present owners, following the discovery that he hasn't been Broadcasting House trained yet — resulting in several horrible messes having to be cleared up in the last month.

A source close to Number Ten commented: "There is a distinct possibility that Humphrys will disappear in mysterious circumstances if he continues to prey on poor, defenceless, mousy Social Security Secretaries. Humphrys should by all accounts be a timid, friendly little creature, whose main purpose in life is simply to sit there and purr, whilst lapping up anything he's told. If he wishes to stay in his nice, warm studio, we'll have no other alternative than to have him spin-doctored."



"Look, this machine hasn't been maintained or inspected in years and, frankly, we feel it's an elf risk"

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

As usual, we have compiled a list from your columns of the most popular Christian names in 1997. They are as follows:

Boys	**Girls**
Ondaatje	Mo
Toppo	Harriet
Lairg	Xena Warrior Princess
Swampy	Zenab Warrior Newsreader
Giggsy	Camilla
Ulrika	Hezza
Branson	Kleenexia
Derry	Kirsty
Gerry	Joska
Po	Posh

Yours faithfully,
Hercules Ceefax-Montefiore
Johnson St Paul, Barking

Those 57 Questions That Mr Robinson Must Answer

(contd from p.94)

55 When Mr Robinson transferred 297 million shares in Spenbelt Holdings (Cayman) Ltd to Guernsey on 25 June 1997, why were his brokers Massingberd, Krafft-Ebbing instructed to place the new shares in a Swiss-held nominee account numbered PX/1079/QT which would not be liable for direct taxation in the UK?

56 In July 1995 Robinson owned 2,412 million shares in Spenballs-Octon. Their market price then stood at 224p. A month later the shares were bought on his behalf by his wife's sister-in-law for 493p who then transferred them to the Orinoco No. 17 account in the name of Madame Chevrolet. The question is, does anyone except Michael Gillard understand a word of this?

57 The question everyone really wants answered is: did he get his leg-over?

Answers to Eye Round Robinson Quiz *(Chairman Robert Robinson)*

Apology

IN COMMON with all other newspapers, we may in recent years have given the impression that the economies of the Asian nations were in some way the most successful in the world. Headlines such as "Up, Up And Away — Malaysian Growth Hits 80 Per Cent", "Korean Dragon Is World Beater" and "Put A Tiger In Your Bank — How Pacific Rim Countries Have Solved Riddle Of Eternal Wealth" might have conveyed the notion that we regarded the Far Eastern economies as a model for the future which we poor Westeners could only view with helpless envy.

We now recognise that there was not a jot or scintilla of truth in any of the above. The so-called "tiger economies" are, we now realise, deeply corrupt, inefficient oligarchies, run on slave labour, and wholly dependent on the billions of dollars they have shamelessly borrowed from Western banks, and which they are now in no position to repay. We are very sorry if our earlier reports led to any confusion in the minds of our readers or caused them to invest their money in these worthless "junk economies". We would like to suggest to them that they should know better than to believe anything they read in newspapers.

"Oh no! He's broken it already!"

THE 1997 BORE OF THE YEAR AWARDS BECOME 'PEOPLE'S BORE OF THE YEAR AWARDS'

by The Today Team, **John Humbug, Sue McGhastly** and **James Naughtiebutnotnice**

IN TRIBUTE to Diana, Princess of Wales, there was a 2-hour silence at the opening of the 1997 People's Bore of the Year Awards, which were staged in the unfinished shell of the new Royal Opera House in Covent Garden (shortly to be renamed the People's Palace of Culture — "Arias 'R Us").

The silence was broken only by the sound of teams of television commentators describing how deeply moving the silence was and how never in living memory had anyone heard a silence like it.

Representing Lord Gnome, who was unavoidably detained in Guernsey instructing his lawyers to issue writs against anyone who said that he was in Guernsey talking to his lawyers, Mr Emmanuel Strobes stepped forward to introduce the master of ceremonies, Mr Jonathan Ross.

SELF-ASSESSMENT FORM

MR ROSS began to read out a series of impromptu "jokes" carefully scripted for the occasion by Mr Daniel Baker (Cab No. 60742). Mr Ross was quickly fired and replaced by the popular husband-and-wife light entertainment duo Neil and Christine from TV's Meet The Hamiltons.

The eyes of the couple lit up as they were handed a large brown envelope by Mr Strobes, but they were aggrieved to discover that it contained nothing but the name of the winner of the coveted People's Bore of the Year Award for 1997 (sponsored by Formula One) — Tony Blair.

Mr Hamilton glumly announced that the judges had had no difficulty in picking the one man who had generated more tedium in six months than anyone since John Major (last year's winner of the Lord Jenkins of Hillhead Lifetime Bore of the Year Award).

The judges had pronounced that "the winner's epoch-making slogan 'New Labour, New Boredom' had ushered in an era of ennui quite without parallel in our island history".

To yawns of disappointment from the assembled celebrities, the sinister figure of New Labour's chief spin doctor Mr Peter Mandelson leaped up to reveal that Mr Blair

was far too busy to turn up for anything, since he was entertaining Mr Christopher Evans and the Teletubbies at one of his glitzy No. 10 soirées in honour of new Cool Britannia.

DANCE TO THE MUSIC OF TIME

MR MANDELSON then lectured the audience for several hours on the immense success of his Millennium Dome project but refused to answer any questions as to what the Dome was likely to contain.

As hundreds of junior spin doctors fanned out through the audience, briefing them on what Mr Mandelson had meant by his speech, dinner was served by the staff at Sir Terence Conran's exciting new dockland restaurant Con de la Bore.

By special permission of Dr Jack Cunningham, the fare included a number of criminally illegal items — viz Oxtail Soup, T-Bone Steaks, Rack of Lamb and Ice-cream with Gelatine.

The Hamiltons then retook the stage to announce as winner of the Earl Spencer "Newcomer of the Year Award", Mr Michael Cole, the bouffant-haired factotum of Harrod's owner Mr Mohammed Al-Fayed.

As Mr Cole issued angry denials that he had ever received the award, a selection of his celebrated Letters to the Press was read out over the public address system by Dame Helen Mirren, including the deeply moving account of how the last words of Diana, Princess of Wales, had been a heartfelt plea to His Holiness the Pope to appoint Mr Fayed Archbishop of Canterbury.

THE REITH LECTURES

THE NAMES were then read out of the candidates for the new "Girl Power Group Bore Award".

Mrs Hamilton joked that she was not going to allow her husband to announce the winner in this category even though "he is a bit of an old woman". There was no laughter at this finely crafted joke (specially written by the scriptwriting team behind Mr Toppo Thompson's hit TV comedy show "I Think It's All Legover").

"The shortlist is," Mrs Hamilton droned, "the Spice Girls, the University Challenge team from New Hall Cambridge ('nul points'), the lady columnists of the Daily Telegraph (including Anne Applebore, Anne McElbore, Claudia Fitzherbore, Janet Daley-Telegraph and 'Agony' Atkins).

"But the winners, by a mile, are the 1997 female intake of New Labour MPs, commonly known as 'the Blair Babes' — although I prefer to think of them as the '101 Dull Maidens'."

There was no laughter at this extremely funny joke which had been specially crafted for Mrs Hamilton by the immensely gifted scriptwriting team behind Father Ted Heath, the popular sitcom involving the insane antics of a former prime minister.

In order to rouse the sleeping guests to even greater heights of somnolence, the audience was then treated to a Radio Three "live concert performance" of Sir Paul McCartney's symphonic masterpiece "Standing Up Stoned", arranged for solo violin by the composer Carl Davis and played by "Ken", the violinist formerly known as "Kennedy".

It was then time for the workmen to return to their task of constructing an enormous corporate entertainment area, covering most of the former opera house auditorium. This was to be known as "The Lord Chadlington Experience" in memory of the titanic figure who had plunged the Royal Opera House into bankruptcy and chaos.

Above the noise of synchronised drilling, conducted by Sir Simon Rattle, the Hamiltons then shouted out the nominations for the Male Group Bore Award (sponsored by the Garrick Club). Mrs Hamilton announced that she would not allow her husband to read these out, since she was "more of a man than he was, any day".

There was a deafening explosion of silence at this extraordinarily witty sally, specially crafted by the scriptwriting team behind the TV comedy hit show Ulrika ('nul points').

"The nominations are as follows: Mr William Hague and his exciting new team of Tory frontbenchers, including Lord Parkinson, Peter Lilley and Michael Howard; the victorious England football team, fresh from their historic 0-0 triumph over Italy; and the Friends of Lord Lairgover, the Lord Chancellor, a

group of hitherto unknown lawyers who have suddenly all been given immensely important posts in the New Labour Government.

NICOLA HORLICK

"BUT the clear winners," intoned the First Lady of Sleaze, "are the Royal Commentators who kept us all soundly asleep by their round-the-clock broadcasting through those dark weeks and months following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales."

At this juncture, Mr Anthony Holden, Mr David Mellor, the Lord Archer, Professor Ben Pimlott and the Lord St John of Fawsley came onto the stage in dark suits and black ties and droned on for several hours about the social, cultural, political and constitutional implications of the greatest tragedy in the history of the world.

As the proceedings ground on in their remorseless fashion, the violinist "K", formerly known as "Ken" played his own arrangement of Vivaldi's One Season (Summer, due to "global warming").

LORD PUTTNAM

THIS PROVED a suitable cue for the new minister for Culture, the Media, Heritage, the Lottery and Sport, Mr Chris Smith and his partner to come on to replace the Hamiltons. "I am sure you will agree that we are a much more conventional couple than the ones we've just had on," quipped Mr Smith, in a finely crafted aside specially written for him by Labour's own Sir Stephen Fry O.M.

Mr Smith said that New Labour was proud to be at the "cutting edge of boredom," and was using cash from the Lottery to fund a new "People's Award for Boredom in the Arts".

"We have had an outstanding year in this respect," opined the Culture Minister, "including the following superb entries."

- The Royal Academy's 'Sensation Exhibition'.
- The film 'The English Patient'.
- The new Oasis album *Let It Be*.

MR BEAN

BUT THE runaway winner, the judges had decided, was the victorious entry for the Turner Prize, consisting of a video showing a group of Cabinet ministers sitting in silence for 5 hours as they tried to think of something to put in the Millennium Dome.

As the winning video came to its breathtaking climax, an enormous out-of-control hot air balloon, bearing the legend "Virgin Trains — It's Quicker By Balloon", crashed onto the temporary roof of the Opera House, causing the entire structure to collapse. As the ceiling fell in, it brought with it an avalanche of unsolicited material comprising the following items: thousands of off-the-peg Versace dresses, as worn by Liz Hurley and Elton John; tens of thousands of Conservative Party election manifestos; hundreds of thousands of yellow "Free Louise Now, You Yankee Murderers" ribbons cut out from the Daily Mirror; millions of Referendum Party "Achtung Britain — Der Tag Ist Hier" videos starring the late Sir Jams Goldfinger; billions of Tamagotchi "virtual reality" baby foxes to be saved from Baroness Mallalieu and her bloodthirsty hounds; tens of billions of portable toilets from Clapham Common's legendary "Gay Pride Weekend"; hundreds of billions of articles in the Times and the News of the World by the late Lord Why-Oh-Whyfront of Weeford; and trillions of rotting flowers wrapped in cellophane removed by bulldozers from the environs of Kensington Palace, home of the late Diana, Princess of Wales.

As the audience was buried beneath this sea of debris the smiling figure of Mr Gerald Kaufman could be seen running on to what remained of the stage demanding an immediate Select Committee enquiry into the "Great Opera House Bore Disaster" to be chaired by a suitably eminent, wise and in all respects qualified person, viz. himself.

"There's one of those new 4x4 off-roaders"

I-SPY ***Pocono Mountains, Pennsylvania***

Submitted by Peter Elsworth. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

PICK OF THE PANTOS

"Newt in Boots"

The People's National Theatre, Brent

TV's Ken Livingstone plays the young man who wants to become Mayor of London. With his pet newt, Trotsky, Ken sets off to see if the streets are properly paved or if they need alternative access facilities for the disabled.

But the evil Lord Archer (played by TV's Jeffrey Archole) has other plans. He wants to be Lord Mayor of London himself and thus become really powerful and famous.

Merry mayhem ensues when Chinese launderer Mr

Wishy-Washy (played by TV's Chris Patten) intervenes saying that *he* wants the job as well.

And if that wasn't enough, the wicked Genie of the Lamp (played by Peter Mandelson of TV fame) decides that Ken and his newt will *never* be in charge of London!

Hilarious songs, dances, sketches and jokes aplenty!

Watch out, Lord Archer, nobody's behind you.

Oh yes they are!

Oh no they are not!

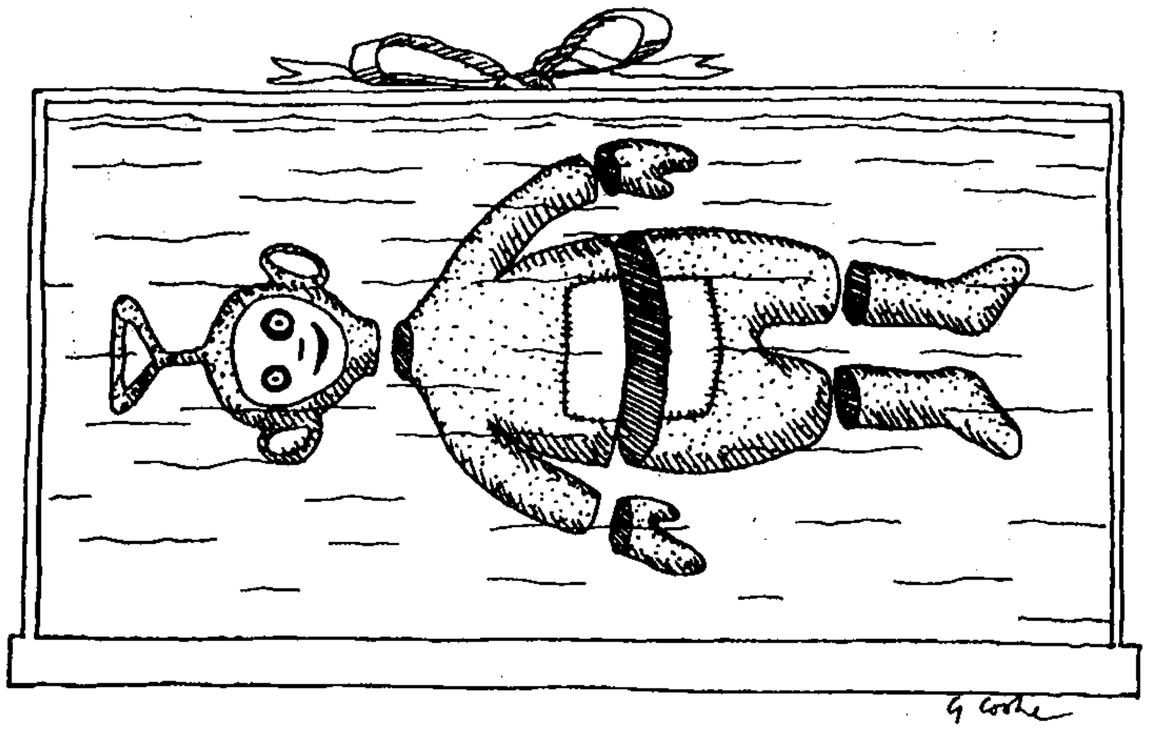
You're right. They're not...

WHAT THEY SAID

"A terrific romp,"
– The Daily Star

"We apologise to Lord Archer for suggesting that he was in any way involved in a romp of any nature,"
– The Daily Star

"What would you like us to say about it, Mr Campbell?"
– The Mirror



DAMIEN'S SON EAGERLY AWAITED HIS PRESENT

The Christmas Blairy

"Tremendously exciting new revitalised enthusiastic young Britain marvellously looking forward to enormously invigorating challenges of New Year & indeed beyond towards New Millennium marvellous beacon of light on the horizon to strive with certainty & hope using all the tremendous talents of the entire nation & not just the few but all encompassing family that is new modern Britain in the centre of Europe holding hands with our partners & inspiring them with newness & whilst maintaining our hope & new invigoration never losing sight of the fact that we're living in the real world where the possible must replace the perhaps & make no excuses for such new hard nosed approach whilst comforting the elderly whose huge resources must be utilised towards a tremendously better future & marvellous wisdom & energy of those who have spent most of their lives in this century & can teach us all so much from experience of what might lie ahead as I make no bones of saying categorically & without any hesitation or denial whatsoever Happy Christmas!"

Harry Enfield/Michael Heath

Yes! It's Britain's Newest Fanzine

BLAIRZONE

TONE and the boys in the band are spending a traditional rock 'n' roll Christmas together — "We're like one big happy family," says Tone "and if we aren't then the offenders will be getting Santa's sack."

There have been some rumours of creative differences in the group with some worries about Tone's change of direction — what he calls "a more mainstream, easy-listenin' vibe" — but Tone insists that the rumours are all lies "and anyone who says they aren't will find themselves getting a seasonal heave ho-ho-ho".

As Tone says in the new *Blairworld* film: "Yeah! Woh! Respect! A Happenin' Christmas to you all!"

© Blairzone

Tony's Big Xmas Sounds

- ■ ***Tears Of A Clown — Geoffrey Robinson and the Miracles***
  - ☐ *Here's To You Mr Robinson (Tony loves you more than you can know) — Lord Simon and Garfunkel*
- ■ ***2-4-6-8 (million pounds in Guernsey) — The Geoff Robinson Band***
  - ☐ *When the Red-Red-Robinson Goes Bob-Bob-Bobbin' along to the Bank — Traditional*

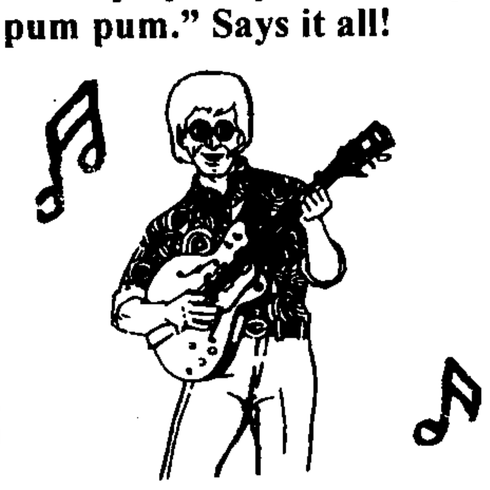
Tone Goss!

● It's true! Tone's had a jammin' session with the legendary Gerry from Gerry and the Peacemakers! It had to be kept a secret but the fellas spent nearly 45 minutes riffin', chillin' and trying to persuade Gerry not to kill anyone! Together they did a wild version of the late, great John McCartney's "Let's Look Me In The Eye And Give Peace A Chance".

● Tone's also been hangin' with legendary blues singer "Mad" Maggie Thatch. They found they had *loads* in common and watch out for their forthcoming collaboration — a new waxing of "Single Mama Mia" by the late, great Abba!

Tone's Thought For Xmas

In the words of the late great Bing Crosby and Sir David Bowie's Christmas Smash "The Little Drummer Boy" — "Pump a pum pum Rhumpa pum pum Rhumpa pum pum." Says it all!



Stop Press
Stop Press
Stop Press

If the press print anything Tone doesn't like — he'll stop it. Got that Ratpack?

New from GnomeTel

Lesley Garrett

TV's No. 1 Hit Diva, with the Choir of New College, Oxford, sings **"Children's Christmas Favourites"**

TO WARM the hearts of young and old alike, opera's greatest star brings you the festive cheer of these traditional yuletide classics.

Hits include:

O Come All Ye Faithful (Teachers Are Disgraceful)
Trad. 1967

God Rest Ye Jerry Mentalmen
Trad. 1939-45

and the immortal

We three Kings of Leicester Square
Selling ladies' underwear
No elastic, how fantastic
Only a penny a pair
Trad. 1953

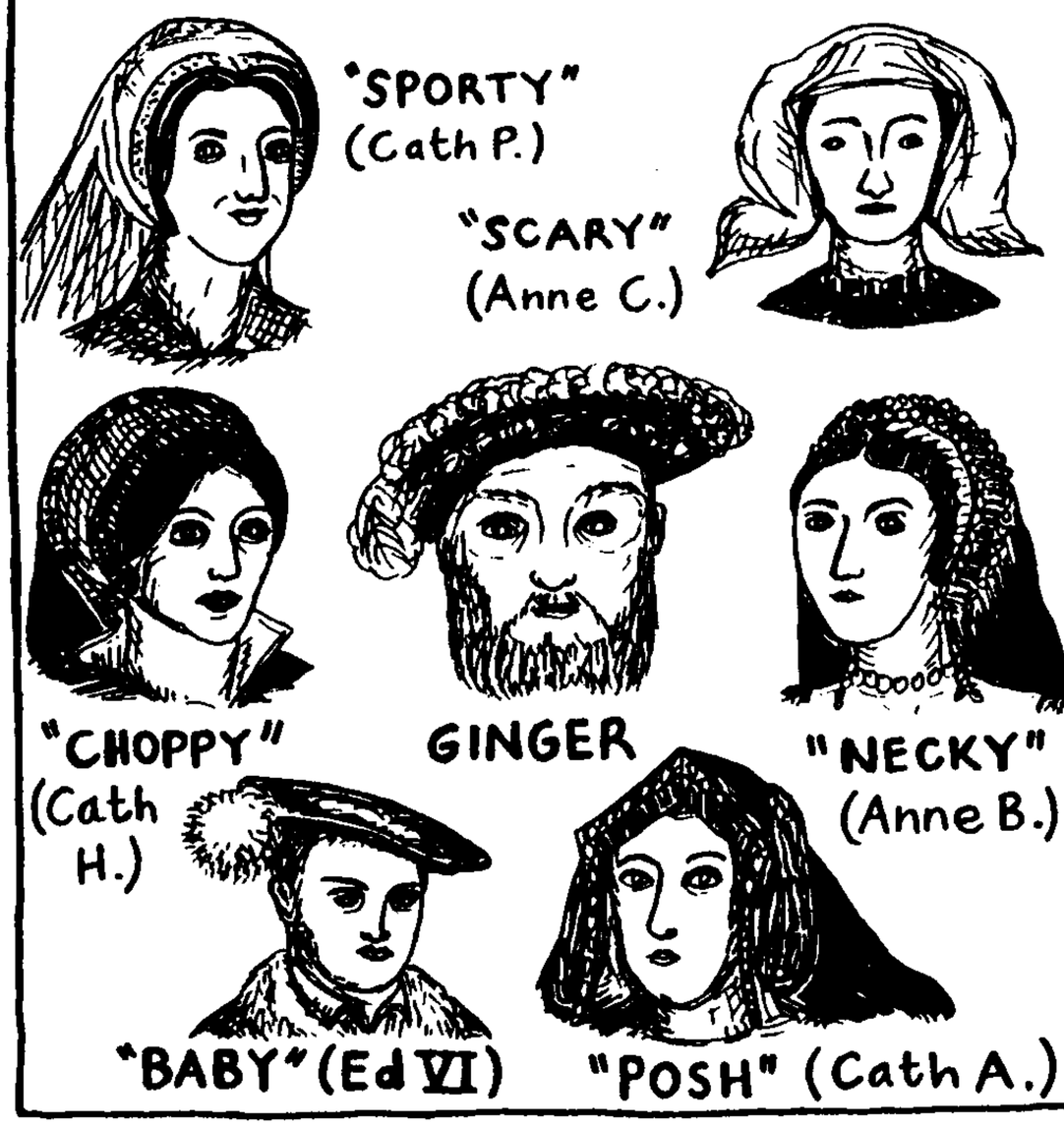
Thrill to the timeless purity of Lesley Garrett's elegy to Christmas past!

"The Best Classical CD This Christmas" – *Radio 3's Nick Kenyon*

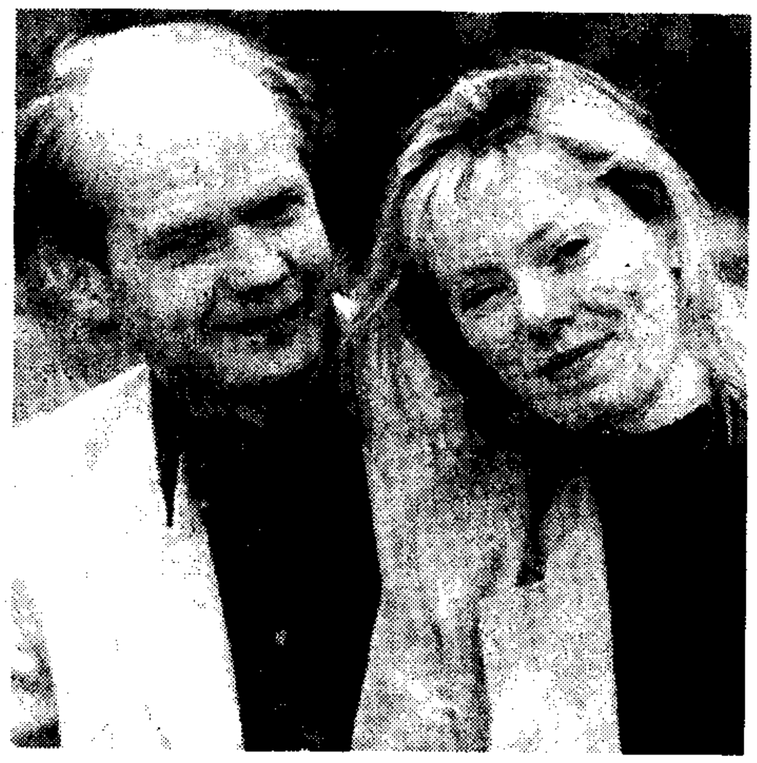
● Also available from GnomeTel
The Teletubbies sing Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*

Apparently... BY MIKE BARFIELD

MODERN BRITISH HISTORY TEACHING



DIARY



WILLIAM HAGUE'S HONEYMOON DIARY

Marriage? It all comes down to communication. That's the lesson I've learnt on this wholly excellent honeymoon upon which I have been delighted to be accompanied by my wholly legal wife, Mrs Hague.

The wedding was, I need hardly add, a huge success, winning over many of the unconverted to our cause. If I judged the mood right, our guests felt good about themselves, and agreed with us that for a marriage to be successful it must represent opportunities as well as difficulties. From now on, we're in the solution business.

As befits my bride's position at the epicentre of the social and artistic scene in Wales, the cream of Welsh high society were out in force. Frankly, there's no one in Welsh social and intellectual life they don't know: Sir Harry Secombe, Max Boyce, TV weathergirl Sian Lloyd, the lot. Needless to say, the family of my imminent bride lent a touch of glamour to the Crypt of the Palace of Westminster, her father wearing his splendid Eistedfodd cap and her mother appearing in a very fetching outfit with a recurring leek motif. Ffion received many compliments — not least from her intended! "Darling," I said, as I greeted her by the altar, "You've never looked so eminently suitable."

My Party Chairman, Lord Parkinson, was good enough to take me to one side before the "big day" to offer me some valuable advice on what one might call the "nitty gritty".

"Do you know much about... the lovely ladies, William?" he asked me, having first placed the "MEETING IN PROGRESS" sign on his office door.

"A woman is like a violin, William," he said, pulling out a comb from his back-pocket and running it through his hair, "If you play her badly, she is liable to make an unearthly racket. But, William, if you play her well —"

Lord P's eyes drifted towards the ceiling. He seemed to be in an almost trance-like state.

"— you can make a baby, Cecil?" I said.

"Who told you? Who told you? The matter's in the hands of my solicitors," he snapped. But I had got the message, fair and square: a woman represents opportunities as well as problems. Once again, the name of the game is all about *establishing connections on a one-to-one basis to produce an apparatus for lasting agreement.*

And so to India, a thousand miles away from the hard slog of British politics and petty party in-fighting! We checked into our extensively-modernised, air-conditioned luxury suite with full tea-making facilities, courtesy towelling robes and satellite television — ideal distractions from the truly dreadful disorganisation of the country outside. It gives me great pleasure to report that our first night as a married couple was truly superb. "Expect a few surprises!" I said to Ffion, before disappearing into the bathroom. I arrived back in the room just under an hour later ("Tarantara!") brandishing my very first Shadow Cabinet reshuffle. I ran through a potted version of it at double-quick speed. "...and finally I'm thinking of moving Gillian Shephard sideways to Transport," I concluded. But sadly Ffion had already nodded off!

Impressions of India (1): In the morning, we decided to go casual and put on our honeymoon leisurewear. We're both young and modern, and we took a joint decision after open discussion that our costumes should reflect this. Ffion wore a beautifully-laundered white T-shirt with well-pressed slacks, whilst I opted for a lightweight runaround grey suit plus my signature baseball cap with lighthearted logo, "Yes — I'm Getting EnouFf!". It makes all the right noises.

And so to the Taj Mahal, hand in hand, as befits our new status. It is a truly magnificent building, excellent for functions and conferences, with easy access to all the main international airports. When I see it, I am immediately inspired to bring out my Psion and tap in a few notes. Then I look Ffion in the eyes — it's an act that management experts have proved time and time again demonstrates integrity, ease and a thoroughly modern can-do approach to life — and I say, "Ffion, we must never forget the eternal message of the TAJ MAHAL". I then summarised it for her:

Target resources
Accessibility
J satisfaction
Market penetration
Activate
Hard-nosed decisions
Affluence
Learning curve

Ffion looks back at me. "Oh, William!" she says, tears in her eyes. She clenches and unclenches her fists — a definite sign, in my experience, that the Lovely Lady is overwhelmed. So Mrs H. liked my poem! And I knew at that moment that — yes! — we can do business together!

Impressions of India (2): By nature and profession, I'm a Management Consultant — and I'll be perfectly frank and say that India is one country that literally cries out for a top-to-tail across-the-board strategy rethink.

Let's make a start with senior management, ie, Shiva. *Problem*: six arms, six hands — overmanned and underemployed. Instead of getting to grips with investment opportunities, Shiva just sits around in holiday leisurewear with a sloppy expression on his face, setting a poor example to all his followers: not only bad presentation but bad leadership too. *Solution*: streamline senior management by releasing four arms and four hands from their responsibilities. This will get the necessary message of rationalisation, credibility and will to win across to the community at large.

Result: A full strategy overhaul in senior management and a worldwide market repositioning that will upfront a more dynamic and innovative response to world demands vis-à-vis spiritual needs. A long-term joint venture with a major Western religion might also be applicable — eg, Roman Catholicism, once they have elected a young, dynamic American pope, preferably married with kids. All in all, a very productive honeymoon. And may I take this opportunity to wish my new colleague Ffion a very prosperous New Year?

SUPERMODELS
KERBER
GOSH DARLING, LOOK AT THIS HEADWEAR. I LOVE IT, I LOVE IT, I LOVE IT.... IT'S ROMANTICISM AND EROTICISM OF THE BONDAGE ORIENTAL FETISH THING!
IT'S THE VIBE, THE BUZZ, IT'S HOT, HOT, HOT!!!
EDITOR
THEY LIKE THE HEADWEAR.... I NEED MORE !!!
CLAP! CLAP!
DARLING, GO OUT AND GET ANOTHER BOX OF CRACKERS.
CLAP! CLAP! MORE HATS!...
CHRISTMA CRACKERS

Anyone acting suspiciously between 7-10pm on Friday should ring East Grinstead police station on 01342 321155.

East Grinstead Courier

The Rev Hodgetts and his congregation invite every member of Steeple to come and join in the carol singing. They will be most welcome. After the carols, tea and mice pies will be served.

Maldon & Burnham Standard

Some shops will also be serving mince pies and mould wine.

Eastbourne Herald

Literary Review

How the NatWest was won

The Search for Peace: A Century of Peace Diplomacy
Douglas Hurd
(Little, Brown, £20)

WHY exactly has Douglas Hurd been chosen to chair next year's Booker prize panel? It cannot be in recognition of his past efforts as a thriller writer, and nor for his current effort as chronicler of world diplomacy. The best parts of his latest book are those that he, or his editors, were clever enough to leave out.

For example, he does not record his throwaway line that ending the arms embargo against the Bosnian government would simply level the killing field. Perhaps at Eton only one team got to bowl, with hand grenades, and the wicket keeper and batsmen were left unprotected. It certainly looked pretty dubious when he joined NatWest shortly afterwards and signed multibillion sweetheart deals with Slobodan Milosevic.

Hurd's insouciance could of course simply have been based on fatuity. For example, he often sermonised that "British policy now is what it has always been — since the days of Pitt the Younger": to ensure that no combination of powers arises on the continent of Europe that could threaten us. But you don't have to be too communitaire to suspect that a policy based on getting the Germans and French upset with each other has some dangers.

Indeed, at the time of Maastricht Hurd intoned: "Of course I've lived through worse times in Anglo German relations than this." He was not referring to his distinguished war service at Eton when the old School Hall was bombed, as recounted with straight face in this tome. No. "I was in Margaret Thatcher's cabinet."

The closest he gets to modernity is a slavish admiration for Sir Anthony Eden — whose bust he commissioned to adorn the foreign office. Doubtless if cut apart, it would have "Suez a mistake" written through it like a stick of Blackpool rock.

Hurd admits that Saddam Hussein used chemical weapons against Iran, but there is no footnote to explain why Hurd's government supplied him with war material during this period; even less his own part in then trying to stiff Matrix Churchill for carrying out his bidding.

In a similar vein, the difference with the Gulf war was not Kuwaiti or Saudi oil. It was that "rarely has a dictator been so ineffective in disguising or excusing his crime". But by this time the likes of Hurd were no longer acting as his accomplices in helping him disguise peccadilloes like poison gas attacks on his neighbours. In contrast, they were all eager to trim fig leaves to cover Milosevic's genocidal attack on Bosnia, whose elected government posed a stark contrast to the corrupt Kuwaiti ruling family that had disenfranchised most Kuwaitis and took little notice of the others.

Repeatedly he returns to his apologist refrain that the war in Bosnia was "essentially a civil war". Well, up to a point. In the same way Hitler going in to rescue the Sudeten Germans was a "civil war". It covers up Milosevic's role in first of all attacking with the Yugoslav army, appointing Ratko Mladic as commander of the Bosnian Serb Army, and then paying and, even now, supplying it (perhaps using some of the billions of dollars from the deal Hurd brokered for NatWest).

Indeed, the closest Hurd gets to criticism of his appeasing predecessor Neville Chamberlain is to suggest that it was "intolerable" that he did not consult the Czechs before Munich. Doubtless he should have gone through the motions as Hurd and his colleagues did with the Bosnian government, and offered them the free choice of annihilation or apartheid-based partition.

The languorous tone of the prose belies the haste in which the work was clearly written, or rather, as suggested in the preface, dictated or transcribed from scraps of paper and then never looked at again. "Communists live in a mixed up tangle of town and villages and the mosaic is the mosaic is the mosaic." What does this mean? Nothing of course and equally appropriately there is no index, only a sheath of blank pages. Still these are the only ones in the book without self-serving platitudes on them.

Books & Bookmen 1997

■ IT WAS about 10 years ago that the men in suits moved in, convinced that publishing firms could defy their corporate history and make a 10 percent annual profit on turnover.

All over London ridiculous sums of money were thrown at some very ordinary books, and the *Bookseller* was crammed with details of staggeringly misconceived, and mostly transatlantic, takeovers. Ten years on, with the men in suits ensconced in Hammersmith and the Vauxhall Bridge Road, what has changed?

Well, the *Bookseller* is still crammed with details of staggeringly misconceived takeovers — notably Random House's acquisition of Reed Trade Books, which required such a herculean effort to conclude that both firms seemed to stop functioning for most of the autumn — and ridiculous sums of money are still being thrown at some very ordinary books that won't pay.

The Booker was won by a lavishly overhyped and overwritten novel from India; the books pages carry more and more earnest reviews of celebrity autobiographies, and the end of the net book agreement

has been a disaster. Selective price cutting was supposed to boost receipts but instead has infuriated consumers by showing that publishers can bring out books cheaply when they feel like it, but not on other occasions. Amid an encircling tide of rubbish, here are Bookworm's publishing awards for 1997:

Most absurd philanthropic gesture: Simon Prosser, newly appointed publishing director of Hamish Hamilton, who recently laid out £200,000 on two novels by Alain de Botton and paid the same amount for a first novel by a Cambridge undergraduette. Given the likely returns, Hamish Hamilton might just as well have stuffed £350,000 worth of fivers into a suitcase and set fire to it.

Vanity of author's award: shared between Salman Rushdie, for his vainglorious *Guardian* spat with John Le Carré, and Will Self, who in a *New Statesman* review attempting to isolate the exact compartment of modern Gothic fiction inhabited by A.M. Homes (see below) obligingly revealed that its other denizens included, well, himself.

Most predictably embarrassing spectacle: the line of serious young critics queuing up on the pages of the liberal broadsheets to "defend" *The End of Alice*, A.M. Homes' dreary novel about paedophilia.

Most principled resignation: Jan Dalley, for throwing over her job as the *Sindy*'s lit. ed. having received one down-market nudge too many from kingpin Rosie Boycott.

Most versatile Booker judge: Jason Cowley, who managed to write several pieces defending this year's pisspoor selection, appeared in the *Times* complaining that the rigours of judging had meant cancelling his wedding, rallied sufficiently to interview the winner, Arundhati Roy, three days later, and then contributed a long piece to *Prospect* lamenting the "flaccid" state of the English novel.

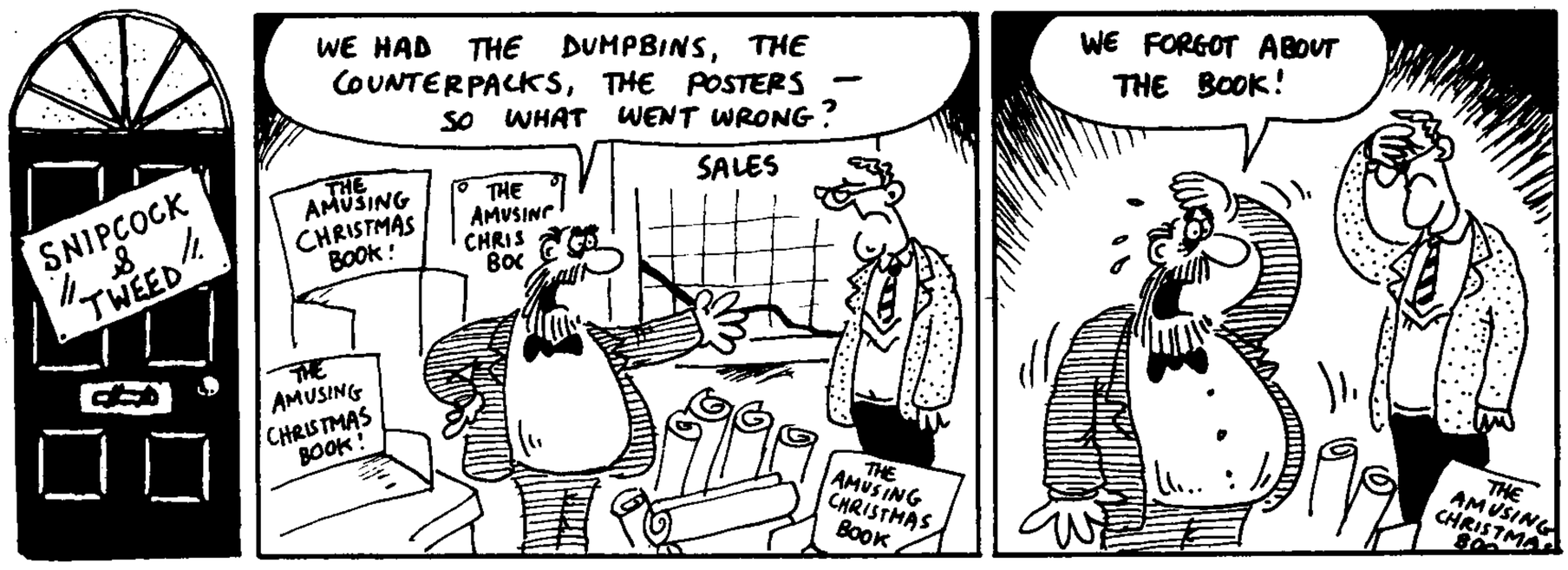
And there you have it. Bad management. Vanity. Stupid money. Comforting, isn't it, to know that in our complex and fast-moving commercial world, some things never change?

SIGN OFF

■ *MYSTIC Meg's clairvoyant skills appeared to let her down when she turned up at a big central London bookshop for a recent signing.*

If she'd known only three people were going to turn up, no doubt she would have stayed at home.

'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
WE HAD THE DUMPBINS, THE COUNTERPACKS, THE POSTERS — SO WHAT WENT WRONG?
SALES
THE AMUSING CHRISTMAS BOOK!
THE AMUSING CHRIS BOOK
THE AMUSING CHRISTMAS BOOK!
THE AMUSING CHRISTMAS BOOK
WE FORGOT ABOUT THE BOOK!
THE AMUSING CHRISTMAS

footnotes

THE QUALITY OF MERCIA

NEARLY two years ago Mrs Judy Gudgeon wrote to the *Eye* protesting about the prosecution of her husband, a community policeman in Malvern. "The whole matter," she wrote, "seems to have been conducted in a thoughtless and malicious manner." The case was sub judice, so no comment was possible at the time. What has happened since entirely justifies her assessment.

Stephen Gudgeon joined West Mercia police in 1987. He had no ambition for high rank. He wanted to be an ordinary community policeman mingling with and assisting the people of Malvern where he lived with his wife and their three children. In 1988 the Gudgeons took in and fostered a nine-year-old girl with severe learning difficulties.

PC Gudgeon has liberal opinions which he often expresses. On more than one occasion he remonstrated with some of his colleagues' homophobia or racial prejudice. He was especially concerned about what he saw as the casual police reaction to a gay-bashing incident in the Malvern Hills in which two men were seriously wounded. He was popular with the people of Malvern but not so popular in sections of the police force.

On 9 May 1995, PC Gudgeon was suspended because of allegations of sexual assault. The allegations had been made to a woman police officer by John Noon, a former boyfriend of hers. A month later, Stephen Gudgeon was arrested and released on police bail. He was later charged with three offences of sexual assault against three young men, all friends of John Noon.

The Gudgeons protested from the outset that the charges were preposterous. Nevertheless their foster daughter, to her great distress, was hauled off to another home. At one stage during their ordeal, the Gudgeons' 12-year-old daughter was interviewed by police who argued that an essay she had written at school gave grounds for suspicion that she had been abused. After a few minutes of the interview, the girl's teacher told the police to stop and the matter was dropped.

STEPHEN'S INNOCENT: Judy and PC Gudgeon

The assault case came to Birmingham crown court on 4 November 1996, 17 months after the arrest. The young men who gave evidence for the prosecution, including John Noon, could not agree on any of the dates when the alleged assaults were supposed to have happened. One of the young men was able to name a definite date because it was the day PC Gudgeon had taken him to Malvern police station to make a statement about the gay-bashing incident. After 11 days, the jury announced that they could not agree on a verdict. A new trial started in April this year.

After three days a juror was overheard by a court official in the lunch break making a prejudicial remark about the defendant, and the judge stopped the trial. In a letter to the Crown Prosecution Service the Gudgeons' solicitors pointed out a series of gross contradictions in the evidence of prosecution witnesses. One young man had given four different accounts of his story. An incident which started off with two in a bed ended with three (the alleged third person, John Noon, denied he was there). The story of a third witness was very different in the second trial from the one he told at the first. The solicitors asked if the matter could rest there. Would their client, they asked, really have to endure another ordeal?

Er, yes he would. A third trial was arranged for 20 October under Mr Justice Jowitt. The prosecution witnesses contradicted themselves all over again. The judge quickly rumbled the absurdities in the prosecution case, and came down firmly on expressions of rumour and prejudice which had been allowed in the previous trials. The jury went out just before lunch on 29 October and returned soon afterwards with unanimous verdicts: not guilty on all charges.

A few days later John Noon went for sentence after his conviction of threatening to kill with a firearm. He was put on probation and community service. His case was greatly assisted by a letter from the West Mercia officer in charge of the Gudgeon case explaining what a great help the firearm specialist had been to the police.

The Gudgeon family's ordeal had lasted two and a half years and cost them thousands of pounds. Stephen Gudgeon has now been reinstated in the West Mercia police but has been told he cannot go back to his old job at Malvern. His divisional commander, Supt Tony Stanley, told him that the events in which he had been caught up had "tarnished the reputation of the Malvern police".

Eye readers (20 May 1994) will recall the role of Supt Stanley as second in charge of the murder inquiry when a pregnant woman, Marie Wilks, was murdered in horrific circumstances by a psychopath on the M50 motorway in 1988. The man convicted of the murder, Edward Browning, had his conviction quashed by the court of appeal in 1994. The lord chief justice had some sharp words for Supt Stanley's failure to disclose a vital police video which wrecked the case against Browning. Stanley, said Lord Chief Justice Taylor, had been "less than frank" with the court and his failure to disclose vital evidence was "most regrettable".

The Glaxo Gang

■ ABOUT three million British people take Vitamin B6 regularly and to their advantage. It is cheap and safe and helps people suffering from all kinds of stress and illness, specially pre-menstrual tension.

At the moment, anyone can buy Vitamin B6 in shops. But the government plans to limit its public sale to tiny quantities. If the new regulations go through, anything over 10 milligrams of B6 will only be available in chemists; and anything over 49mg will need a prescription.

The government is taking this drastic step on the advice of the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT). The committee recommended the restriction on the basis of two studies: one from a Harley Street clinician who prescribes progesterone, an expensive hormone cream for treating PMT; and another who has criticised the government's use of his figures. The overwhelming majority of medical research finds nothing unsafe in Vitamin B6 unless it is taken in truly enormous quantities. This has been overlooked. Why?

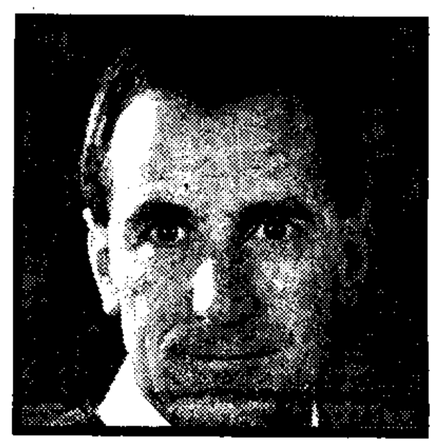
Five facts to remember.

1 Vitamin B6 is cheap and not very profitable. Its vast sales cause irritation and envy in the drugs industry which sells remedies for the illnesses assisted by B6 at a much more respectable profit.

2 Ten out of the 19 members of COT have declared a personal or corporate interest in the big drug companies. Four of them declare an interest in Glaxo or Glaxo Wellcome.

3 The government's restriction is profoundly unpopular among Labour MPs, more than 100 of whom have signed an early-day motion condemning it. Alan Simpson, Labour MP for Nottingham South, wrote recently to a constituent: "My own belief is that the regulations have been brought in largely at the behest of the big players in the pharmaceutical industry and we should not presume that their interests bear any resemblance to the public interest."

4 The decision to restrict the sale of B6 was bravely taken in the teeth of this opposition by, among others, public health minister, Tessa Jowell.



ALAN SIMPSON MP

5 Tessa Jowell's brother, Dr James Palmer, is head of medical and regulatory affairs at Glaxo.

BYRNE'S UNIT

MORE about Liam Byrne the dashing young executive from Andersen Consulting who last year groomed the entire Labour front bench in the techniques of being a Minister (see *Eye* No 938).

Byrne worked full-time at the Millbank election headquarters of the Labour Party for at least six months before and during the election while still being paid by Andersen Consulting.

He was effectively in charge of the "business endorsements unit", but his more crucial work was liaising between the Leader's Office and the top secret "high donors" unit run by Amanda Delew. He worked hard to ensure that the work of this unit was kept secret from ordinary members of Labour Party staff. He was dubbed by Matthew Taylor (now the party's assistant general secretary) "Mr Andersen Consulting". Mr Byrne also liaised closely with the personal representatives of the Shadow Cabinet who were seconded to Millbank. These were officially known as "anchors" though whenever the word was posted up on doors or notice boards some subversive Old Labourite added at the beginning the mysterious letter "W".

Counter Pain 3

■ **PETER BROOKE, MP for Westminster and former Tory cabinet minister, boasts that he has "remonstrated" with the Post Office about the shocking state of London's Queensway post office. His postbag bulges with constituents' complaints about 50-ft queues and half-hour waiting times.**

BABBLING: Brooke MP

Somehow Brooke forgets to mention the real reason for the Queensway chaos: the headlong rush of the Post Office, encouraged by Brooke's government, to privatise ("enfranchise") as many post offices as possible before the general election.

Queensway was one of the unlucky offices caught in the stampede. The counter staff was de-unionised, sacked and replaced with fewer and more inexperienced workers on lower pay with the inevitably chaotic results. Allegations about the haste and greed of the privatisation led to an inquiry and the suspension of four top Post Office executives (see *Eye* 935).

In the autumn Post Office executives assured a deputation of angry customers that everything would get better under a new manager at Queensway. The new manager came and went, and the situation is now so awful that the Post Office, at great expense, has sent in a properly-trained team from publicly-owned and unionised crown offices elsewhere to sort things out.

Will this sort of thing be allowed to continue? Six months ago most people would have bet on a Labour government putting a stop to any more post office privatisation. Now all bets are off.

DON'T TELL SID, HE'S VANISHING

■ **TONY FAIRMAN, an *Eye* reader in Maidstone, was one of the enthusiasts who responded 11 years ago to the "Don't Tell Sid" campaign to privatise British Gas. The point of the campaign was to encourage ordinary people to become small shareholders in the exciting new democratic enterprise.**

In October this year, Mr Fairman and lots of other Sids were told that BG plc (as British Gas is now known) was undergoing a "share capital reorganisation" which reduced his shareholding by almost 12 percent. Almost at once, the Sids got a letter from city stockbrokers Hoare Govett Securities and Cazenove. The letter generously offered anyone who had 2,000 or fewer shares in BG plc the chance to sell them free of all commissions and dealing expenses.

Though the letter pretended otherwise, this seemed like a bribe to help persuade silly little Sids to get out and find something their own size. Mr Fairman translates these two initiatives into a simple message from BG plc: "SOD OFF SIDS".

The company strongly disagrees. A spokeswoman told the *Eye*: "The intention of the recent capital reorganisation was not to remove shareholders from the register. It was implemented to improve the capital efficiency of the company which in turn will benefit all shareholders." Then she gave the figures.

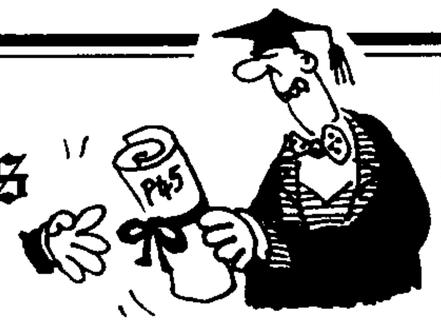
● The number of shareholders who used the free share-dealing service offered at demerger was 202,517.

● The free share-dealing service offered at capital reorganisation will continue until 19 December. Take-up figures are not yet available.

● The number of shareholders who sold their B share entitlement under the first offer was 540,000.

● The number of British Gas shareholders at privatisation was 4.5 million. The number of shareholders in BG plc today is 1.4 million.

High Principals



ONE QUANGO HOPPER JUMPS RIGHT OVER THE OTHER QUANGO-HOPPER'S BACK

■ **NOT long after Mr Neil Merritt resigned in disgrace as vice-chancellor of Portsmouth University (see last *Eye*), his wife finished her term on the board of the Portsmouth Hospitals Trust.**

This deficiency has now been made up. In May Mrs Anne Monk, wife of Colin Monk, who came from Ealing College to Portsmouth University with Neil Merritt and is now the university's pro-chancellor, was appointed to the trust board.

The very idea that a university vice-chancellor could be on the board of a hospital trust used to shock the Labour party when it was in opposition. In office, the line on quango-hopping can be different. Frank Dobson has just announced the appointment of Mr Brian Booth as chairman of the Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. Mr Booth is vice chancellor of the University of Central Lancashire.

THE THINGS THEY SAY

"To ensure that continuity and consistency exists, in the presentation and forward vision in the provision of *all* services related to Personnel Management Function, the department name will change formally. The Personnel Department will, with immediate effect, be called Human Resources Department. The staff appointment titles will be relative also i.e Human Resources Officer and Human Resources Assistant. This reflects the drive within the department to provide a futuristic, realistic and full embracing operational faculty to meet the needs of all the college's departments and their staff. The outdated scenario of the 'personnel' function being a regulating overhead will be replaced by a flexible service provider which can contribute to the bottom line results of the College in both staff and Profit and Loss".

Full text of a "Human Resources Memorandum" circulated to staff at Kensington and Chelsea College by Mr Malcolm Houghton-le-Chapple, "a consultant in human resources contracted to the College".

WHAT A BURKE

■ **"Ask Dominic Burke" is the standard reply of Roger Ward, the chief executive of the Association of Colleges when he was asked about the Eye's revelations about his payments from Burke Ford insurance group, of which his friend Dominic J. Burke is managing director.**

So the Eye did just that. We asked Dominic Burke about Ward's contention that the £650 month payments were rebates on previous pension policies. We asked

1). Why could the rebates not be made to the policies?

2). Why were the rebates paid by instalments?

3). How long did the payments continue after April 1995?

Back came Dominic Burke's reply. "It is this company's policy in such circumstances not to comment in relation to its own business nor that of its clients and I am therefore unable to assist you further".

These matters are now under investigation by a firm of solicitors in Gosforth in the North East where Roger Ward went to school and where his mother lives. Mr Ward has stepped down as AOC chief executive pending the inquiry.

GRAND SECURITY QUIZ

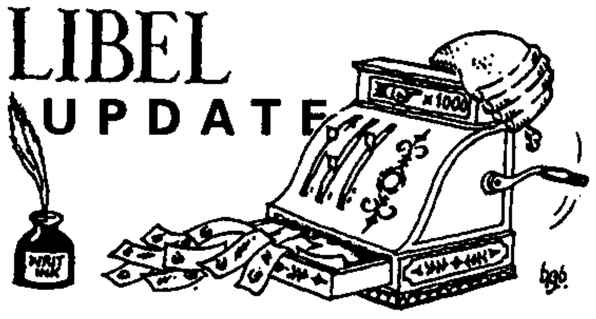
CAN you name the government department from which 15 items were stolen last year at a cost to the taxpayer of £21,000?

Answer (of course): The Crown Prosecution Service.

You can write to Paul Foot at 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG, or leave a message for him on 0171 287 3183

NEWS

LIBEL UPDATE



PETER Carter Fuck & Partners must have fallen on hard times: the esteemed libel specialist is now acting for a mere vanity publisher, Minerva Press Ltd.

Minerva specialises in relieving naive would-be authors of thousands of pounds. Almost without exception, the gullible wannabes never recover more than a fraction of the outlay. Nevertheless, on Minerva's behalf Carter Fuck is gallantly engaged in a campaign of legal intimidation after a number of disillusioned authors asked for their money back after claiming that they had been ripped off.

The threat of Fuck, it is reckoned, should be enough to cow the pensioners and lonely widows with literary ambitions whom Minerva is so eager to exploit. Indeed, even a recent story by a *Bristol Evening Post* reporter was spiked after Fuck got wind of it and threatened a writ.

Minerva's "publishing plan" works like this. The would-be author who has failed to find a mainstream publisher sees an "Authors wanted" ad in a mainstream newspaper such as the *Guardian* or *Telegraph* and writes to Minerva's "office" at 2 Brompton Road, London SW7 (a forwarding address). A standard letter promises a high level of royalties once a "financial contribution" has been made towards costs. The punter then submits his or her manuscript and receives a glowing "evaluation", irrespective of merit.

The flattered author then shells out his or her "contribution" — often several thousand pounds — and waits for the royalties. As the few copies printed are not marketed or promoted to any degree, the authors are invariably disappointed. A Mr X of Kent paid £2,400 to have his novel published. Nearly two years later eight copies had been sold, netting Mr X £16.35. Mrs N of Essex paid £1,800 and got £21.28 back over two-and-a-half years. Mrs W of Norfolk paid £1,800 and had received £47.30 two years later.

Following an Advertising Standards Authority advice note about vanity publishers to newspapers and magazines in September, Minerva has inserted a caution that there is "no guarantee of financial gain" in its promotional material. For "no guarantee" read "not the slightest chance".

When one 85-year-old author asked for proof that Minerva was a genuine, longstanding company, he was sent a reproduction copy of *Observations on the Establishment of the Bank of England*, by Sir Francis Baring, printed by the Minerva Press of Leadenhall Street in 1797. Most impressive — but no relation to the modern Minerva.

A particular target of Fuck's threats has been Johnathon Clifford, a longstanding campaigner for truth and honesty in vanity publishing. He has been threatened with proceedings seeking damages and an injunction, but he said he would be "extremely grateful" if Fuck took him to court so the matter could be aired. Amazingly, the proceedings have failed to materialise. Johnathon Clifford can be contacted on 01329 822218. His advice is free.

EXACTLY three years ago the *Eye*, Harlech Television, the *Independent* and the *Observer* lost a libel action brought by a former north Wales police officer, Gordon Anglesea. The argument about legal costs has gone on ever since and has only just been settled.

The victorious Police Federation solicitors, Russell Jones and Walker, put in a bill for £1,663,557 which they claimed the libel action had cost their clients. The claim went to "taxation" by neutral high court assessor. The bill was reduced to £1,016,000, a reduction of £647,0000, nearly 39 per cent of what was claimed.

Russell Jones and Walker appealed against this reduction. After another year's expensive legal argument, they settled for just £35,000 extra — chicken feed compared to their legal costs for the appeal. A year's litigation had achieved absolutely nothing.

RACING TIPS

GRANDEES at the Jockey Club in Portman Square have made a surprise appointment: Ashley Bealby, clerk of the course at Southwell racecourse, has been given the important role of stewards' secretary.

The appointment is surprising because it is unusual to move from clerk to stewards' secretary — and because only days earlier Bealby had been fined £1,000 for five breaches of the Jockey Club rulebook.

Bealby and his racecourse were censored by the club's disciplinary committee for failing to provide sufficient medical cover. The breaches were discovered during spot inspections which followed the death of jockey Richard Davies in a fall at the course last year.

This was not Bealby's only tangle with the Jockey Club: in March he was fined £500 by the same disciplinary committee for not following correct procedure when abandoning a race meeting. The fixture at Wolverhampton (where Bealby was then working) was called off at the last minute on Boxing Day, though racegoers had earlier been told the meeting would go ahead. Such was the outcry over the abandonment that the club adapted its own rulebook to insert a ruling that "when racing is in doubt, an inspection must be held with the chairman in attendance".

Although Bealby has been fined twice within a year for breaching Jockey Club rules, the club's stewards should be pleased to have him on side. His mother, father and brother are Jockey club stewards, and Jockey Club member Lord McGowan is his father-in-law. Bealby made himself even more popular with stewards when he inaugurated a race at Wolverhampton which was restricted to steward jockeys.

POLICE 5

MERSEYSIDE's Knackers got a not inconsiderable bollocking from Mr Justice Ognall at Preston crown court recently after he sentenced three men to jail for their part in the murder of nightclub bouncer Stephen Cole, who was hacked to death by machete in his local pub.

During the trial it emerged that a police patrol car was following a convoy out in pursuit of Cole. After witnessing the armed gang search for him in vain in two pubs, the boys in blue turned back to deal with "other jobs".

Justice Ognall described this as "a very serious deficiency in police procedures" and argued that if they had continued to follow the convoy the police might have prevented Cole's death or at least caught more of his attackers.

They are not the only Scouse Knackers in trouble. Moonlighting police seems to be all the rage in Murkeyside at the moment. When Avon and Somerset police investigated the attempted murder of a Merseyside man caught trying to get into the Glastonbury festival without a ticket, for example, they were surprised to find no less than 12 off-duty officers from Merseyside's "elite" operational support division working at the festival for Irish-based security firm, Events.

In a statement "re: Chief Supt Ian McDonald", the Merseyside police revealed that allegations about officers "employed in a private capacity" were the subject of an internal disciplinary investigation.

When the *Eye* asked McDonald if he was connected to Events he denied any knowledge of the firm. Nothing has been proven against him but as the investigation drags on it may be hindering his career. He recently went for the assistant chief constable's job but found his application blocked by the home office while the investigation continues.

Meanwhile there has been extra-curricular activity of a different nature in Toxteth where a senior officer has been suspended after allegedly being spotted cruising the red light district in off-duty hours. The embarrassment caused by incidents like these must make Merseyside's chief constable Sir Jim Sharples only too glad he is retiring soon.

PROMOTION

POSITIVELY Belfast, a promo company set up to improve the city's image, has closed after a series of events it organised went disastrously wrong.

And a national audit office (NAO) report has chastised the department of the environment in Northern Ireland for pouring public funds into the company.

Positively Belfast was supposed to promote Belfast yet ended up spending almost £1m in Portrush, a nearby town, where it staged a senior open golf tournament. It held the tournament against the advice of the Northern Ireland office and the event lost £600,000. Positively Belfast also spent £100,000 on a boat race that never took place and £60,000 on its opening firework and laser show.

NAO investigations into the company's book-keeping found a trail of unspecified hospitality bills and receipts scribbled on the backs of envelopes. Two civil servants appointed by the DoE to monitor Positively Belfast have since retired. But its chairman, Lord Glentoran, has gone on to greater things: he has since been made chair of the Northern Ireland Classic Golf Events and put in charge of the millennium fund in Northern Ireland. Just the man for the job!

COMPUTER LATEST

COMPUTER experts at the Vehicle Inspectorate have been working closely with their suppliers to develop a computer system which will improve the effectiveness of the inspectorate's testing and enforcement functions.

Work was expected to be completed this year, but technical problems have held up the launch. It will not now start until next May.

Vehicle Inspectorate chief executive Ron Oliver says the delay is "disappointing". But who is the inspectorate's tardy supplier? Step forward EDS, the computer company famous for its cock-ups at the Child Support Agency and the Student Loans Company.

Meanwhile, EDS has also been having difficulty in local government circles where it has been hit with financial penalties by the London borough of Bent after failing to meet targets.

Bent, which has a £50m outsourcing deal with the Texan computer giant, accused EDS of underperforming in its collection of council tax and of losing vital files. EDS must now pay Bent £9,000, although the company insists it is not at fault and has actually improved tax collection.

Wandsworth borough council is also penalising EDS for failing to meet targets in responding to housing benefit claims.

AULD ACQUAINTANCE

WELCOME back to "Long" John Silver, the failed entrepreneur who featured in the *Eye* in the mid-80s after he forfeited a lucrative contract to supply a site hospital to the Falklands.

Nurses, personal assistants and contractors were unpaid and his company Medco International was compulsorily wound up.

Now Silver has reemerged with Envotech Engineering Ltd, which won a contract from Brighton health authority to supply a temporary operating theatre for a local hospital by stripping and reequipping a room.

Following a familiar pattern, Silver handed management of the project to another company, N.A. Cullen & Co Ltd, who did the work. Silver received £65,000 for the job but failed to pay the managing firm the £17,500 it was owed.

N.A. Cullen went into voluntary liquidation as a result. Electricians, painters and decorators were all unpaid as well, and Silver now receives his post via a firm of auditors in Leamington Spa. His home address changes so regularly his creditors find it impossible to keep up with him. When the former owners of N.A. Cullen asked their accountant to write him a letter demanding their money, he issued a writ against the accountant for libel.

The department of trade and industry is investigating — but will Silver's creditors ever receive their money?

In the City

THE minister for tax havens Geoffrey Robinson has created a skilful smokescreen behind which he has endeavoured to cover the Labour government's blushes over that nice little £12m-plus earner in tax-free Guernsey.

Helped by treasury disinformation specialists Ed Balls and Charlie Whelan's carrots and sticks, Robinson has sought in interviews to present a version of events which relies heavily on his own economy with the facts and the byzantine complexities of tax law to confuse and distract.

Just how much his holiday home guests Tony Blair and Gordon Brown know or want to understand about the secrets of the Orion Trust is far from clear. The dear leader shows a remarkable lack of understanding of what is involved every time he publicly defends "Rich Robbo" with references to no assets leaving the UK tax net and no tax avoidance by the multi-millionaire. It is almost as if the Guernsey Family Robinson who are the only beneficiaries of the Orion Trust were some other Robinsons!

The tax facts are these:

1 Any cash distribution paid to Robinson, his wife, his children, his sister and her children by Orion Trust will be received tax free as a gift in the UK because the trust was established by a non-resident, the ever so grateful Joska Bourgeois; **2** Robinson and/or his relatives have already received such benefits (unquantified) from the trust tax free although he has asked not to be similarly enriched while he is a minister; **3** The Orion Trust has already received £235,000 in tax free dividends on the shares it took up instead of Robinson in last year's TransTec "rights" issue. It will receive another cheque for £108,000 tax free next month. This payment includes the dividend on the additional 2.95m shares transferred to the trust in puzzling circumstances after the election, it would appear from the Bourgeois estate (executor/beneficiary: G. Robinson) or another Bourgeois trust. It is not clear who received the dividends on these 2.95m shares prior to September this year. The tax free dividend for 1996 would have been a further £71,000. All these dividends would have generated a tax bill of £50,000-£100,000 a year if Robinson had held the shares personally onshore. **4** The 12.776m TransTec shares now owned by Orion Trust if sold tomorrow would realise around £11.8m capital gains tax free for the Guernsey Family Robinson. Ironically there is as yet no gain but a loss. While the stock market has been rising TransTec has been falling and the trust to date shows a loss of £1.76m. But should the price recover than any sale would avoid handing over probably 40 percent of any profit to the taxman. **5** The shares will be forever outside the inheritance tax net on Robinson's death — a current potential saving, even at the lower price, approaching £5m.

All this would be completely different if Orion Trust was UK resident for tax purposes — something Robinson and the other discretionary beneficiaries could achieve by the minister for tax havens making another of his "suggestions" to the independent trustees. So much for the Blair statement: "He has not avoided UK tax."

Exactly what view of the Orion Trust and its dealings with Robinson is taken within the Inland Revenue is unknown. What is certain is that if he were not a treasury minister and close friend of the prime minister and the chancellor, a buff envelope might already be on its way to either Robinson's Park Lane penthouse or to one of the his 'n' her's Lutyens mansions seeking further information — irrespective of the £1.4m contribution millionaire Robinson says he has made in five years.

Before reaching for an onion it is worth noting that you have to earn it to pay it, and Robinson could still have had to struggle by on a mere £2m from his TransTec dividends and salary before he became an unpaid minister. Now the Geoffrey Robinson Personal Settlement — his blind trust — will receive the dividends on his 17.65m shares. A small cheque for £150,000 before tax will be winging its way to the trust next month for the interim dividend. So unlike single mothers or the disabled, the Guernsey Family Robinson will not need to engage in any belt tightening during the festive season. No wonder Robinson can afford to waive his ministerial salary. It would only add to his tax bill.

The Revenue in normal circumstances would be very interested in offshore trusts which seem to be as "accustomed" to act in "accordance with" the "suggestions" of a discretionary beneficiary as the Orion Trust. Robinson has admitted he legally suggested two deals to Orion — buying into TransTec and Coventry City Football Club (he was already involved in both) — and, surprise, surprise, they agreed. A football club is not a normal investment for a trust as there is no income; but against that any capital profit, which could be substantial, would be worth waiting for and tax free. He told them not to make any distributions to him earlier this year and they have presumably agreed.

However, the Revenue would have to prove the trustees do not make their own decisions, always a difficult if not impossible task without the silver bullet document, and in this case clearly not true. Should the minister be asked (most unlikely while he is in office), he would be able to state quite correctly that the trustees are totally independent and can always ignore his "suggestions" because he is only a "discretionary beneficiary".

Of course Robinson could end all the criticism of hypocrisy over limiting tax breaks for others while enjoying tax relief on £12m by offering to bring the Orion Trust onshore and into the UK tax net. Failing that the background to the trust and its unusual self-investments needs further illumination. Such as the answers to the following still unanswered questions:

1 Who are the Orion Trust trustees and why should their identity be so secret unless, like the fact that the trust was established after the death of its settlor Mme Bourgeois, this raises eyebrows? If they were Rothschilds or one of the major Guernsey players, surely this would only serve to confirm their independence? **2** What is the connection between Orion Trust and small time company managers/trust administrators Richmond Corporate Services or possibly the Elfin Trust Company? **3** What benefits have been paid to the Guernsey Family Robinson by the Orion Trust? **4** What are the terms of the Orion Trust trust deed? **5** What are the terms of the Bourgeois will as it benefits Robinson or the Orion Trust? **6** Why did he cease to be an executor of the estate earlier this year? **7** Was this in any way related to the transfer of the 2.95m TransTec shares to the Orion Trust? **8** Did Robinson take advice as to whether by being an executor of the will he might also be seen as a settlor of the Orion Trust, thereby "tainting" its non-resident status and making any distributions to UK residents taxable? **9** Who owned the 2.95m shares before Orion: was it the Bourgeois estate, and who received the dividends from these shares? **10** Why were these shares transferred to the trust the day before the election; was Robinson still an executor at that time, was he still an executor when the Orion trustees were "informed" that the proposed transfer of the shares to the trust had not taken place; and who signed the deed of addition making the transfer? **11** Why did Robinson — as did Stenbell — not simply borrow the £10.1m to take up the 9.8m TransTec shares on the "rights" issue if the company was so keen that he subscribe? **12** Did Orion Trust lend Stenbell £10.1m of its own money or did it borrow the money, perhaps from Credit Suisse which holds the shares in its nominee name? **13** Was the loan interest free to Stenbell — and if not, how much did the Robinson company pay in interest to Orion, thereby increasing its assets, or to a bank? **14** Did the Orion Trust trustees or a bank require a guarantee for the loan and if so from whom? **15** Given that the "rights" issue was fully underwritten and the Robinson shares would have been subscribed anyway, why did Robinson not just say he could not afford it and sell the rights at a profit rather than facilitate the shares being acquired for the benefit of the Guernsey Family Robinson?

If he cannot or will not answer these questions, Tony Blair might be looking for a different and more expensive Tuscan holiday next year.

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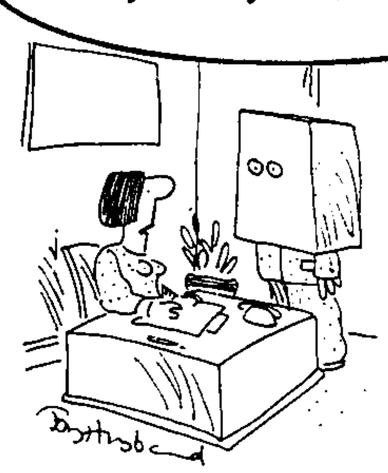

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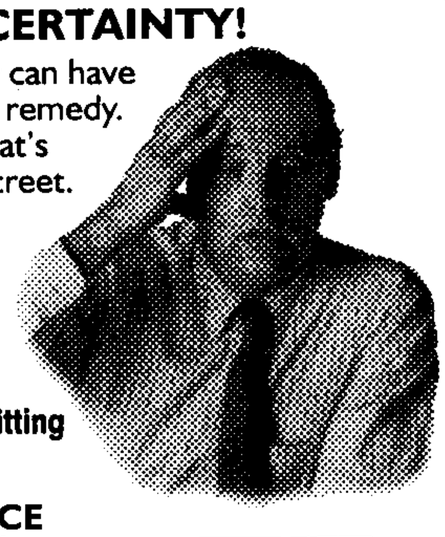

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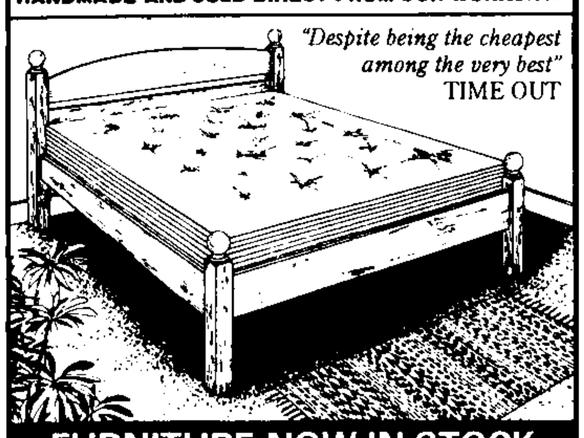

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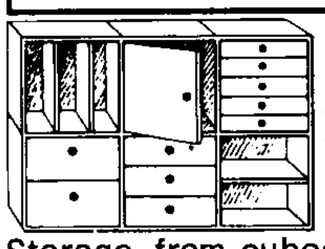

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